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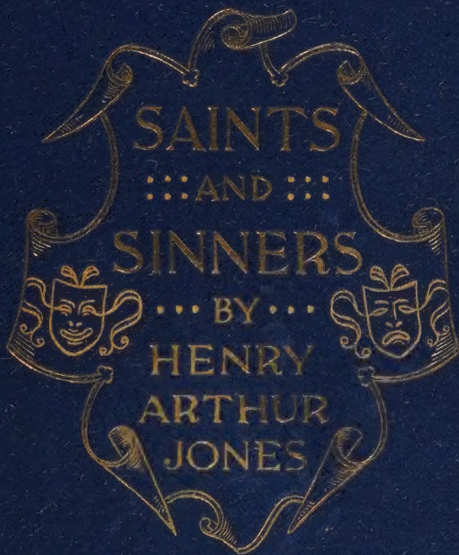
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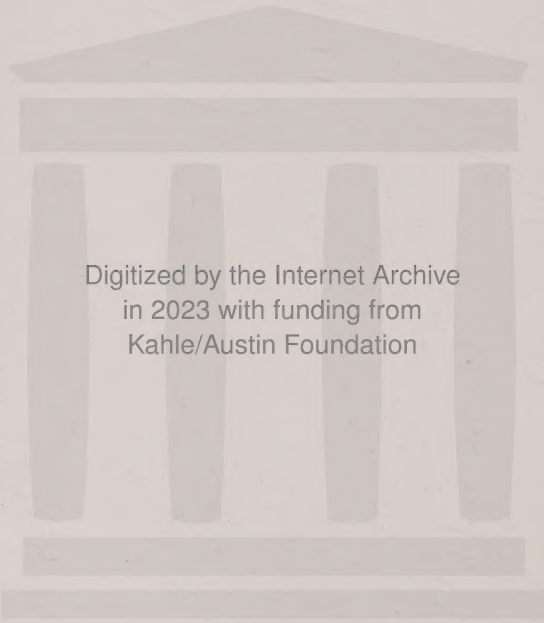


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SAINTS AND SINNERS



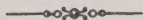
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SAINTS AND SINNERS

A NEW AND ORIGINAL DRAMA
OF
MODERN ENGLISH MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE

IN FIVE ACTS

BY
HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF
'THE DANCING GIRL,' 'THE MIDDLEMAN,' 'JUDAH,'
AND 'WEALTH'



London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
AND NEW YORK
1891

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PREFACE

I

THE passing of the American Copyright Bill is a fact of the highest import for English playwrights and for the future of the English drama,—that is, if the English drama has a future. It will indeed afford an accurate gauge of any individual playwright's pretensions, and of the general health and condition of the national drama. Hitherto the publication of an English play would have incurred the forfeiture of the American stage-rights, in many cases a very serious pecuniary loss. It would also have been attended with a very grave artistic risk. The best American managers—those who are capable of doing justice to the author in the production of a play—would naturally have refused to touch it unless their stage-rights were protected. It would have been presented,

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if at all, under the worst auspices, and with the worst and most haphazard stage management and surroundings.

Under these circumstances it is a question whether the placing of a play in the hands of the reading public would have compensated for its loss of influence in its legitimate sphere on the stage, and for the discredit brought on the author by inadequate and irresponsible production and performance.

Further, in the present uncertain relations of English literature and the modern drama, an author may be excused for having some doubts as to whether the interests of either are to be served by the publication of plays whose perusal may only serve to show how sharp is the division between them. The American Copyright Bill removes these disabilities, and makes it inexcusable to yield to these doubts. If, from this time forward, a playwright does not publish within a reasonable time after the theatrical production of his piece, it will be an open confession that his work was a thing of the theatre merely, needing its garish artificial light and surroundings, and not daring to face the calm air and cold daylight of print. And further, if a custom does not now arise in England, such as prevails

in France, of publishing successful plays, and if a general reading public is not gradually drawn round the drama, then it will be a sign that our stage remains in the same state of intellectual paralysis that has afflicted it all the century. Our drama will continue to be a "Slough of Despond" in the wide well-tilled field of English literature, an irreclaimable bog wherein, as in John Bunyan's, "twenty thousand cartloads of wholesome instructions" have been thrown without improving the way.

But it will be urged that many successful plays will not "read" at all, while in many others the passages that charm us most in the study are those that bore us most on the stage, and the passages that do not strike us at all in reading sometimes come out in letters of fire at the theatre. This brings me to remark what it is one of the chief objects of this preface to enforce and illustrate, namely, that there is a certain very strong antagonism between the literary and theatrical elements of a play. Very often this antagonism is more apparent than real, very often it is the just rebellion of the theatrical ass (I am speaking quite figuratively) against carrying a load of literary luggage that does not belong to him; very often it is his native friskiness refusing to carry any

literary luggage at all,—that is, to drop metaphor, it is the mere impatience of intellectual exertion in a theatre on the part of both entertained and entertainers. But whatever the cause of the quarrel, and whatever the various and debatable circumstances that may place the blame on the one side or the other, there does exist this very palpable antagonism, and jealousy, and desire of mastery between the two elements, theatrical and literary, that make up a play. So much so that on seeing some popular plays one is tempted to exclaim, “The worst and deadliest enemy of the English drama is—the English theatre.”

It is not my province here to deal at length with the relation between English literature and the modern English drama, or rather with the want of relation between them. I am only concerned to establish the general rule, that the intellectual and art values of any drama, its permanent influence and renown, are in exact proportion to its literary qualities. Shakespeare and Sheridan are popular playwrights to-day, strictly on account of the enduring literary qualities of their work. They have admirable stage-craft as well, but this alone would not have rescued them from oblivion. The French drama has been

operative intellectually and has commanded the respect of the civilised world because its authors have been men of letters, and because their works have always been available and recognisable as pieces of literature. There has been a definite literary standard below which it was impossible for any French dramatist of standing to sink. In England there has been no literary standard, and no ready means of marking the literary and intellectual position of the modern drama. The most amazing masterpieces of artificiality, extravagance, and theatricality have been rapturously received by the great British multitude without ever being examined as works of literature or studies of life. Every great literary critic of the age has contemptuously spoken of the modern drama, or has more contemptuously ignored it. If any little flame of authentic literary fire has arisen, it has quickly flickered out in the inane air. Perhaps the most accurate idea of the literary status of the modern drama can be gained from the style and form of presentation of those plays which for necessary business theatrical purposes it is considered advisable to print. Nothing could better express the frank contempt of the English theatre for English literature. In the first of Mr. William Archer's volumes on the modern

theatre, *English Dramatists of To-day*, will be found what will surely be a sociological curiosity of great interest in another generation or two—a transcript of the most popular scene from the most popular and money-making comedy of our time. At present it is severely instructive reading. I shall doubtless be called to account for sneering at what has brought innocent delight to thousands. Innocent delight! Fireworks and Aunt Sally are innocent delights, and there is no deadly sin in an exhibition of chromolithographs.

Perhaps some of my remarks would be more applicable to the theatre of ten or twenty years ago. In quite recent days it may be gratefully acknowledged that in London at least a new spirit is kindling our audiences, and a new strong desire is openly expressed that the modern drama should take its rightful position as a national art in definite relation with literature and the other arts, with an acknowledged intellectual status and declared intellectual and artistic aims. The piercing light of science has been sprung upon us behind the scenes, and our worn-out old apparatus of theatrical effect and situation looks half-ghastly half-trumpery in that cold cruel beam. Ancient and well-established purveyors of the old regulation

theatrical fare are pathetically declaiming against the fickleness of the public taste. Strange that this poor docile good-natured public, which has always been so comfortably conservative, should at last get a glimmering in its head that the English drama is, or should be, mainly and chiefly the art of representing English life, and not the art of sensational and spectacular illusion, nor the art of building up an ingenious Chinese puzzle of comic or thrilling situations! Strange! What will become of the British drama if this new idea should take root and grow?

To return to the examination of the opposing literary and theatrical elements in a play. The comparative intellectual and literary degradation of the modern drama for two or three generations past is due to the fact that plays have been chiefly considered and exploited from their purely theatrical side, and as a vehicle for exhibiting the powers and peculiarities of an actor or a company. Now it is quite natural and just that an actor should have the highest opinion of his art, and that he should wish to subordinate the purely literary element in a play. I do not mean that he will wish to cut any literary speech that occurs in his part, or that he will not like to win the praise

that is bestowed upon a literary production. But naturally and of necessity under our present system those plays, and those parts of a play, will be exploited which give the actor an immediate chance of dazzling the public. And the play will be considered with this chief end in view, of ministering to the popularity of the actor, rather than with any idea of presenting a perfect piece of literature and of restoring play-writing to its lost dignity of a national literary art. It will of course be said that this is the dramatist's concern and not the actor's. Quite so, but it cannot be anybody's concern while the playwright is the actor's servant. The present system in England of manufacturing plays to order and to exploit some leading performer is quite sufficient to account for the literary degradation of the modern drama and for the just contempt with which it has been viewed by the intellect of the nation during the last twenty-five years. How is it possible that a writer can put his best work into what does not spring spontaneously from his heart and convictions? And a comparison of the stages of England and France for the past generation gives an exact answer to the questions "What is the result of putting the theatrical elements of a play in the first place?" and "What is the result

of putting the literary elements in the first place?" While it is highly significant that the recent adoption by a leading French playwright of the English practice of writing plays to order for a star performer has marked a notable decline in the quality of his work. And the effect on the audiences is also correspondent and answerable. For the public is pliable and teachable within very considerable limits, and by a natural law it grows tolerant of and responsive to the conditions imposed upon it. And further, it is impossible for an actor who sees nightly audiences deeply impressed and stirred by theatrical devices not to suppose that these are the very essence of the dramatic art. Finally, so many and so binding and so perplexing are the necessary conventions and limitations of playwriting, that the author watching his public closely and for dear life's sake being obliged to keep in touch with them, becomes also confused and is often led astray to mistake some stale trick of the stage for a fundamental law of its being.

Now the custom of publishing our plays at least offers a chance of escape from some of these difficulties and absurdities, if it does not open up a larger and higher sphere for the dramatist. In dealing with this question

on a former occasion I omitted to distinguish between the two kinds of success that a play should strive to win. There is the immediate theatrical success, which is largely due to acting, stage arrangement, and management; and there is the more permanent and worthy renown, which is literary and intellectual rather than theatrical. Thus, while in the case of the *School for Scandal* this higher renown belongs to Sheridan, the theatrical success of any revival depends upon the cast and stage management and other details entirely belonging to the theatre. Now my contention is that our present system tends to deny this higher and permanent renown to the dramatist, tends to keep his eyes off his great task and his great reward, tends to docket him as a journeyman-assistant in the cheaper and temporary theatrical success. When one glances at our great Victorian literature, at its conspicuous achievements in poetry, in fiction, in history, in biography, in science, in criticism, it is impossible to doubt that it might have been equally triumphant in the domain of the English drama had some stream of its great flood been by chance diverted across that arid common. Perhaps if one searches a little into causes, the intellectual poverty of the drama of this century may be chiefly

ascribed to the Puritan dread of the theatre, and to those other reasons which have kept the English from being a playgoing nation as a whole, and have also kept any considerable portion of cultivated playgoers from forming a body of sound dramatic opinion amongst themselves.

But the prejudices that have kept the English from being a playgoing nation are rapidly breaking up, and more encouraging still, a body of carefully discussed and examined dramatic opinion is being gradually formed amongst the more advanced section of playgoers. The intellectual ferment of the age has reached the theatre and has begun to leaven it. I have tried to indicate what appears to me one of the great hindrances to our advance to a higher level. While audiences are trained to regard the theatrical elements of a play as the essence of the matter, plays will succeed or fail mainly on their theatrical merits, and at best we shall remain in our present position. No very high literary or intellectual average will be maintained because the prizes are to be looked for in another direction, and for other qualities.

Nothing that I have said must be held to imply contempt of theatrical success, or disrespect of those

whose devotion to their own art naturally inclines them to rank it in the highest place. And I am very glad to acknowledge here my immense debt to those who have been associated with me in the representation of my plays. It would be impossible for me to appraise my indebtedness to them too highly, or to give them too much credit for their share in the measure of theatrical success that I have obtained.

But I hope I shall not be misjudged or censured if I continue to insist upon the comparative worthlessness of all mere theatrical success. The passing of the American Copyright Bill will prove the mettle of English playwrights. It will show whether we are capable of seizing and holding our great legacy as the inheritors of our Elizabethan forefathers, or whether we are only fit to be the lackeys and underlings of French *farceurs*, supine, effete, disabled, and impotently dallying with the great issues of human life as with a child's box of wooden toy-men.

The English drama has a great chance to-day. There is but one way of advancing or even of holding our own, and that is by making the theatre a national art with a definite literary and intellectual basis, disdainful of all theatrical effect that will not submit to

take an auxiliary place. There are a dozen, a hundred different ways of tumbling back into folly and insincerity and theatricality.

We have amongst our dramatic critics more than one man who may justly claim that he has done more to advance the popularity and prosperity of the theatre than any living author. And we have many who love and honour the drama, and are dissatisfied with its present condition. I am sure no greater service can be done to the English drama than for those who are our appointed judges to insist that we shall no longer shelter ourselves behind the illusions of the theatre, the talent, the passion, the insight, and the personalities of our interpreters, but that we shall reveal the true character of our own work, and show whether it has any lasting vitality and truth in it apart from its momentary apparition behind the heated glare of the footlights.

II

I leave the general question of the advisability and importance to the English stage of establishing a custom of printing successful plays, and come to the

smaller matter of the individual play here given to the public in its printed form for the first time.

After I had obtained a great financial success in melodrama, and was temporarily in a position to write a play to please myself rather than to suit the exigencies of a theatrical manager, I gave many months to the writing of *Saints and Sinners*. I was not then very well acquainted with all the many necessities of theatrical production, and the niceties and peculiarities of audiences at particular theatres, and I confidently reckoned upon as great a success in my new venture as I had just obtained in what I knew to be the cheaper and coarser art of melodrama. But at the outset the piece was very dubiously received, and the general impression obtained in theatrical circles that I had only proved my incompetence to write plays away from the theatrical leading-strings which had hitherto guided me. And before I knew that the piece had settled into an assured success, I had weakly sold myself to what the *Saturday Review* justly calls, "the dull devil of spectacular melodrama." And I remained a bonds slave for many years.

I am conscious of very many defects in the play. I wish I could ascribe them to the bad school in

which any English playwright who began to learn his art in 1870 was necessarily nurtured. And I wish I had the time and will to remedy them. But having once left a play I find it very difficult to re-enter into its spirit, and it is almost impossible for me to give additional vitality to characters that I have once parted company with. And with more important tasks pressing me, I do not think it would be profitable for me to do more than I have done during the last few days, namely, remove a few extravagancies and touch up the dialogue where I could do so easily, and without disturbing the general tenor and necessary succession of the scenes. But, though I may not lay the flattering unction to my soul that the artificial conditions of the English drama at the time of my learning stagecraft were responsible for all the failings of *Saints and Sinners*, I think I may honestly plead them as an extenuation of some of its worst defects.

Nothing could give a better idea of the standpoint of the average British playgoer, of his utter incapacity to view a play as a study and representation of life, or to look upon it as anything but a comic entertainment designed to make him laugh by any possible means, than the first criticism I overheard

upon *Saints and Sinners*. The play was produced, for the purpose of getting the players easy in their parts before facing a London audience, at the Theatre Royal, Margate, in the presence of a holiday audience. A very uproarious farce had previously been running at the London theatre where *Saints and Sinners* was announced for production on the following Thursday. The Margate audience assembled with the expectation of a repetition of the broad nonsense which such an association promised. They showed a certain amount of interest, but their chief feeling was one of puzzled and somewhat shocked uneasiness and discomfort. I went into a hotel to call for a friend and heard a group at the bar discussing the play. One sentence fell upon my ear, uttered in a puzzled, distressed, dissatisfied tone, "A lot of folks going into a little chapel!" That an English playwright should select for representation on the English stage a scene in which a great body of his countrymen constantly figure one day in seven, and which is of the utmost significance in the general sum of English life, seemed so amazing and outrageous a violation of all the known canons of playwriting to this honest Margate playgoer, that I have never to this day been able to rid myself of the sense

of having done him a deep personal injury. While the same failure to understand the elementary axiom of dramatic composition was exemplified by an otherwise intelligent free-thinker, who was observed to show great resentment and contempt whenever the minister gave utterance to any sentence implying a religious belief.

Half the audience thought I was canting, and the other half thought I was blaspheming. The play ran almost two hundred nights at the Vaudeville Theatre, some of its success being doubtless due to the discussion it raised as to the playwright's right to portray contemporary religious life. The article I wrote in defence of my position in *The Nineteenth Century* review is here reproduced as an appendix. It was never answered, and not one of its contentions was combated. The liberty there demanded for the dramatist has been since most freely accorded on all sides, and the boundaries there marked out indicate the present recognised domain of the stage. Perhaps other stage reforms which are resisted to-day will be also accepted as matters of course when as many years shall have passed from the statement of their claims upon the goodwill of the public.

Though the first general reception of the play was chilly and carping, I received very warm recognition of its aims from one or two quarters. Especially the sketches of the smaller characters and the deacons were much praised, and also in certain quarters much blamed. The character of Hoggard was censured as impossibly vile. But allowing for the necessary sharpness and swiftness of stage portraiture, and the impossibility of exhausting or even suggesting all the minute motives and aspects of character in a theatre, I think Hoggard may be claimed as a not unfair representative of a very widely-spread class in narrow English religious communities. There is of course a very strong connection between the general character and conduct of a nation and its creed, but every day gives us instances of a ludicrous want of harmony, or apparently of even the most distant relation of any sort between a man's religious professions and his actions. And this at-first-sight astounding discordancy of belief and practice is much more frequent in the narrower and smaller and less intellectual sects, and is partly the correlative of a low degree of intelligence. Any one who has carefully studied the curious and grotesque inconsistencies of religious profession and conduct in England will, I

think readily concede that a bitter and stubborn and blind disregard of the primary duties to one's neighbour is not at all an uncommon characteristic of religious professors in the class from which Hoggard is taken. At the same time, I think it would have been better to have shown in some way that this is not necessarily the accompaniment of the deacon's office. A well-known Nonconformist minister, while cordially recognising the faithfulness of the types of deacon in Hoggard and Prabble, and declaring that he knew them personally, suggested that I should also have made George Kingsmill a deacon, which would have removed all suspicion of bias. I scarcely found that possible, and I thought that in the person of Jacob Fletcher I had rendered a full acknowledgment of the sterling qualities to be found in English dissenting life.

Upon the occasion of its first performance the piece was played, apart from a few quite unimportant alterations, as it is here published. But the death-scene proving too sad for the genial associations of the theatre where it was to be performed, I accepted a kind suggestion from a well-known critic, and changed the last scene into a happy union between Letty and George. I did this with some reluctance,

but I reflected that on the whole the final *dénouement* was not of such vital consequence as the presentation of the picture of English religious life. I do not think I shall be harshly judged by those who understand what have been the inner conditions of writing for the English stage and the concessions demanded by the public until quite recently.

In restoring the original ending I am pleased to think I am acting not only in harmony with my own feelings, but also with the judgment of Mr. Matthew Arnold. In appending a letter he wrote me after seeing the piece, I am pleased to acknowledge his constant courtesy and encouragement, and to remember that I was instrumental in bringing him to the modern theatre after a great many years of absence. His letter runs as follows:—

“I went to see *Saints and Sinners*, and my interest was kept up throughout as I expected. You have remarkably the art—so valuable in drama—of exciting interest and sustaining it. The piece is full of good and telling things, and one cannot watch the audience without seeing that by strokes of this kind faith in the middle-class fetish is weakened, however slowly, as it could be in no other way.

“I must add that I dislike seduction-dramas (even

in *Faust* the feeling tells with me), and that the marriage of the heroine with her farmer does not please me as a *dénouement*.

“Your representative middle-class man (Hoggard) was well drawn and excellently acted.”

So wrote to me the sweet singer who lies silent to-day by the banks of his beloved Thames. No, not silent! For another saying of his comes aptly to my memory and has a bearing upon the present attempt to bring together English literature and the English stage—“The theatre is irresistible! Organise the theatre!”

If I have earned his commendation and “weakened the faith in the middle-class fetish,” much battered in other quarters of recent years, I have fulfilled my main design in presenting this play. For I do not claim any great merit for *Saints and Sinners* apart from that of representing with some degree of faithfulness, and with due regard to the requirements of the modern stage, some very widely-spread types of modern middle-class Englishmen. If it be objected that they are rather commonplace and uninteresting, I can only urge in defence that it is impossible to suppose that God Himself can have taken any great degree of pride in creating four-fifths of the present

inhabitants of the British Isles, and can hardly be imagined as contemplating His Image in the person of the average British tradesman without a suspicion that the mould is getting a little out of shape.

LONDON, *14th April* 1891.

Produced first at the Theatre Royal, Margate, on Monday 22d September 1884 ; and at the Vaudeville Theatre, London, on 25th September 1884, filling the bill nightly until Easter 1885.

CHARACTERS.

JACOB FLETCHER, Minister of Bethel	
Chapel, Steepleford . . .	Mr. THOMAS THORNE.
GEORGE KINGSMILL, a Young Farmer	Mr. HENRY NEVILLE.
CAPTAIN EUSTACE FANSHAWE . . .	Mr. H. B. CONWAY.
SAMUEL HOGGARD, a Tanner, Senior	
Deacon at Bethel	Mr. MACKINTOSH.
LOT BURDEN, Foreman to Hoggard,	
Collector of Pew-Rents at Bethel	Mr. FRED THORNE.
PRABBLE, Junior Deacon at Bethel .	Mr. E. M. ROBSON.
PETER GREENACRE	Mr. LESTOCQ.
UNCLE BAMBERRY	} Mr. F. GROVE.
RADDLES	
LEESON, Fanshawe's Man	Mr. W. HOWE.
RAILWAY PORTER	Mr. AUSTIN.
TOM MARKS	Mr. RANN.
LETTY FLETCHER, the Minister's	
Daughter	Miss CISSY GRAHAME.
LYDIA, the Minister's Housekeeper .	Miss KATE PHILLIPS.
MRS. PARRIDGE	Miss GIFFARD.
FANNY PARRIDGE	Miss PEACH.

The action takes place in the present day in the Midland town of Steepleford and its neighbourhood, and in one scene of the Third Act at Torquay.

ACT I.

"TWO LOVES I HAVE."

SCENE—The Minister's Study.

(A day passes.)

ACT II.

A BIRD IS SNARED.

SCENE—1. Rodimore Woods at Sunset.

2. Ousebridge Junction.

3. The Minister's Study.

(A month passes.)

ACT III.

LETTY CHOOSES.

SCENE—1. A Room in the Minister's House.

2. Villa at Torquay.

(Five days pass.)

ACT IV.

JACOB CHOOSES.

SCENE—1. Exterior of Bethel Chapel on Sunday Morning.

2. The Vestry.

(Four years pass.)

ACT V.

LIVED DOWN.

SCENE—Jacob's House on the outskirts of Steepleford.

TIME IN PERFORMANCE.—2 hours 38 minutes.

ACT I

SCENE—THE MINISTER'S STUDY, a room in a small old-fashioned house in a country-town, very homely and unpretentious; rather dingy old well-worn furniture; a portrait of Letty's aunt in her girlhood at back; two collecting-boxes on the mantelshef.

Doors right and left. Bay window at back. Fireplace left.

Enter LYDIA, *the Minister's housekeeper, an unromantic-looking woman of thirty, showing in* LOT BURDEN, *a plain common little fellow about thirty-five.*

LYDIA. The Minister's gone out for his morning walk, but he'll be back directly.

LOT. I've just collected the quarter's pew-rents, and I've brought the money.

(Pulling a little bag out of pocket.)

LYDIA. Oh, give it to me, Mr. Burden, and I'll put it away before the Minister sees it.

(Takes money and puts it on table.)

Bless his heart, he's just like a baby with his money!

LOT. Ah, we ought to be as wise as serpents in

this generation, Miss Lydia ; and Mr. Fletcher lets everybody impose upon him.

LYDIA. To be sure he does. If I let him have sixpence (*sits*), he's safe to give it away to the first undeserving beggar he meets. It makes me wild, and me working off my fingers to keep us all decent on less than eighty pounds a year.

LOT (*admiringly*). Ah, what a manager you are, Miss Lydia. I've always thought I could never afford to get married ; it's so expensive, and children will come, but with—with such a saving woman as you, I—I think I should like to try it, Miss Lydia !

(*Nervously sighing and looking lovingly at*
LYDIA.)

LYDIA. There, that's enough, Mr. Burden, don't make them sheep's-eyes at me.

LOT (*fidgeting with chair*). Why not, Miss Lydia ? We could save money together ; and it's so nice to save money. And Mr. Hoggard has just raised my wages.

LYDIA. What's he done that for ?

LOT. I've been a good faithful servant and I deserve it.

LYDIA. Rubbish ! Mr. Hoggard wouldn't raise your wages because you deserved it ; he ain't that sort.

LOT. Notwithstanding, he has raised them ; and what do you say, Miss Lydia ? Marriage is honourable, the Apostle says.

LYDIA. The Apostle had never been married. No, Mr. Burden, I'm much obliged, but I can't leave

the Minister. How do you think he'd manage without me?

LOT. There's Miss Letty.

LYDIA. Letty! Why, she ain't no more use in the house than a pet squirrel or a canary-bird.

LOT. No, she ain't a bit like us Chapel people, is she?

LYDIA. No, she favours the Langtons, her mother's family. The Langtons, was Church folk, and always very gay and worldly.

LOT. Ah, didn't one of the Miss Langtons——

LYDIA. Yes, but that ain't neither here nor there. Miss Letty it was, that's her picture.

(Pointing to picture.)

Our Miss Letty is named after her.

LOT. You've been with the Minister a good many years, Miss Lydia.

LYDIA. Ever since I was nine years old, and could light a fire and clean a saucepan.

LOT. Talking about Miss Letty, Steve Williams says as he's seen her several evenings in the Lovers' Walk with that Captain Fanshawe, from the Great House.

LYDIA. What! Our Letty walking out with such a man as that! Steve Williams must be mistook.

LOT. He said he was sure.

LYDIA. I don't believe it! I'll ask her when she comes in. (JACOB and PETER GREENACRE pass by window at back.)

Here comes the Minister, and, I declare, he's bringing in that drunken old Peter Greenacre.

JACOB (*outside door*). Come in, Peter! Come in!

Enter JACOB FLETCHER, a country dissenting minister, about fifty, very gentle and kindly, shabbily dressed. He stands at door holding it open for GREENACRE, who shambles in, a disreputable old man with evidences of hard drinking. He stands hat in hand, bowing, and scraping his feet.

LYDIA. You don't mean to say you'll let this drunken old vagabond impose upon you again, Master?

JACOB (*rather timidly*). Well, you see, Lydia, he's spent all his parish pay, and he's had nothing to eat for two days, and we can't let him starve, can we?

LYDIA. Yes, we can, and the best thing he can do.

JACOB. Come, find him something to eat, Lydia.

LYDIA. Yes, that's just the way! You'll fat him up like the prodigal son, and he'll live till he's ninety.

(*Old GREENACRE stands bowing and cringing.*)

JACOB. Let's hope so. Peter has been no saint in his time, and we must keep him alive till he repents.

GREENACRE (*bowing and cringing, speaks in a trembling gin-sodden voice*). I'm a monument of grace, Muster Fletcher.

JACOB. Nonsense, Peter! A monument of gin and water, you mean.

GREENACRE. I've attended your ministry for the last twenty-five years, Muster Fletcher.

JACOB. Ah, that shows what bad sermons I preach, or you wouldn't have been so drunk last Wednesday.

GREENACRE. The flesh is weak, Muster Fletcher.

JACOB. And the gin at the "Three Pigeons" is strong, eh?

GREENACRE. I'm regular in my place at Chapel every Sunday evening, Muster Fletcher.

JACOB. You are, Peter, and every week-day evening you're just as regular in your place at the public-house.

GREENACRE. I never neglect the means of grace, Muster Fletcher.

LYDIA. No, nor the chance of wheedling a meal out of the Minister.

JACOB. Ah well, Lydia (*rises*), don't be too hard on him. He isn't the only one who makes a comfortable living out of coming regularly to Church or Chapel.

(*Going up to bookcase.*)

LYDIA (*snatching up the bag of money that LOT has brought in, pushes GREENACRE before her*). 'There! Be off into the kitchen, you old rascal! And the next time you come sponging on the Minister, I'll give you a glass of gin and water with poison in it, I will, as sure as you're a living sinner!

(*Hustling him off at door.*)

GREENACRE. Thank'ee, Miss Lydia, thank'ee.

(*Exit, pushed off by LYDIA.*)

JACOB. Well, Lot, what is it?

LOT. The pew-rents have fallen a good deal this quarter, sir. Only fourteen pounds odd.

JACOB. Oh, only fourteen pounds, eh?

(Looks up and down his coat, which is very old and much darned.)

Well, after all, new clothes are very uncomfortable, and when a coat has served you well for six or seven years, and got to be a sort of companion, it's ungrateful to throw it away because it's getting a little bit shabby; it's like passing by an old friend because he's down in the world.

LOT. You see, Mr. Fletcher, you don't go the right way to increase the pew-rents.

JACOB. No, Lot? How's that?

LOT. Why, all the poor folks of the town come to Bethel; all the scum, all the riff-raff, all the publicans and sinners, as you may say.

JACOB. Well, yes; they're the very people that I want to come.

LOT. But they've got the best seats in the Chapel, and they don't pay pew-rents.

JACOB. They can't afford to buy their religion.

LOT. Then they ought to take it in the gallery, and be thankful. If we were to put them in the back seats, we should get some fashionable folk in the front pews.

JACOB *(rises)*. No, Lot, we'll let it stay as it is. There are plenty of places where the poor have to

take back seats ; we'll keep one place where the rich and the poor shall meet together and be equal.

LOT. Well, sir, I'm sorry, but the cause ain't prospering in a pecuniary sense ; and if you please, sir, I should like to give you five shillings a quarter more. Mr. Hoggard has just raised my wages.

JACOB. Has he? It's very generous of him, because he told me that business had gone down since Mr. Bristow's death.

LOT (*looking fixedly at JACOB*). Oh ! Have you quite decided to take Mrs. Bristow's money out of the business?

JACOB. Yes. You see, Lot, I am Mrs. Bristow's only surviving trustee, and if the business is really going down——

LOT (*with meaning*). Don't you do anything in a hurry, sir.

JACOB. What do you mean, Lot? You make me feel very uncomfortable. Poor Mr. Bristow left his wife and children in my care, and I'd rather lose my own money than theirs, and—and—you know I'm no hand at money-matters. Mr. Crisp has valued everything.

LOT. Yes, I know, sir. Crisp is Hoggard's valuer.

JACOB. And ours too. Do you know anything against him?

LOT. Oh sir, Hoggard's my master, and he'd turn me off if he knew I'd mentioned this.

JACOB. He shan't know it. Go on, Lot, tell me.

LOT. Well, sir, don't you let Mrs. Bristow go out of that business at Mr. Crisp's valuation. You have a new valuer (*emphatically*), as sharp a one as you can get. I dursn't say any more.

JACOB (*pause—looks at him*). Thank you, Lot. You have said quite enough. Mr. Hoggard will be here directly, and I shall know how to act.

LOT. Don't you thwart him, sir; he's a great support to Bethel. He pays twenty pounds a year pew-rent. He's a hard man, and if you once go against him, he'll pay you home, as sure as his name's Hoggard. (*HOGGARD passes window.*)

Here he is. Don't let him see me here, sir, he might suspect. I'll go out this way through the passage. (*Exit quickly at side door.*)

JACOB. I'm very glad I happened to see Lot. In another hour I should have signed the deed.

Enter LYDIA showing in HOGGARD, a blustering well-to-do middle-aged man of business, pushing LYDIA aside.

HOGGARD. All right, my good woman. I know my way. (*Exit LYDIA.*)

HOGGARD (*in a loud patronising tone*). Ah, Fletcher, good-morning, good-morning (*giving hand*).

JACOB (*shaking hands*). Good - morning, Mr. Hoggard.

(*HOGGARD seats himself, stretches his legs, rubs his hands.*)

HOGGARD. Very hot, ain't it?

JACOB. Yes, it's splendid weather for our Sunday school treat.

HOGGARD. Ah, I'm going out that way to-morrow. Lovely scenery, Rodimore Woods. I've a great eye for natural beauty myself. I'm going out that way to see if I can get a bit of land for a new tanyard. I may drop across you. Well (*rubbing his hands*), suppose we get to business, eh? (*Draws chair up.*) You got my note?

JACOB (*hesitating nervously*). Yes, and I've decided not to take Mrs. Bristow's money out of the business at present.

HOGGARD (*blankly staring at JACOB*). I don't understand you, Fletcher.

JACOB. I should like first to have the property valued by another valuer.

HOGGARD. Well, I'm astonished! I'm perfectly astounded! To think what a set of unbusiness-like idiots there are in the world.

(*Rising, puts chair back.*)

Why, my dear sir, Crisp has prepared the deed, and I really can't allow you to open the question.

JACOB (*quietly*). I haven't closed it yet, Mr. Hoggard.

HOGGARD. What? Oh, come, come, come!

(*Follows him up.*)

This is really very absurd! This won't do! I must

insist on our bargain. Come, Fletcher, I know you've had a lot of trouble in this matter, and—

(Takes out his purse, takes out two notes, puts them on table in front of JACOB.)

I meant to give you this last Christmas. There, take them! Take them!

(Pushing the notes towards JACOB.)

JACOB. What's this for, Mr. Hoggard?

HOGGARD. Why, you've been trying to do me out of my fair bargain, but I don't cherish an un-Christian spirit. There! Take them! Put them in your pocket! *(Pushes notes towards JACOB.)*

JACOB. No, Mr. Hoggard. I can't take a bribe to blind my eyes, and prevent my judgment.

HOGGARD. Bribe! Bribe! Have I been your deacon all these years, and do you think I would offer you a bribe?

JACOB. Then you offer me this money quite apart from Mrs. Bristow's affairs?

HOGGARD. Of course I do.

(JACOB goes to shelf, takes off two boxes, one marked "For the Poor" and the other "Contributions to Steepleford Hospital.")

JACOB. Then will you please put one of these notes into the poor-box, and the other in the hospital box? *(Puts boxes in front of HOGGARD.)*

HOGGARD. Eh! Eh! Well, if you choose to fling the money into the gutter.

(About to put the money into the box.)

No ! on second thoughts you've made a very serious imputation on my character, and I'll put the money back in my purse.

(Does so, and buttons up his pocket.)

JACOB. Mr. Hoggard—

(Puts boxes on shelf again—comes round table.)

do you consider Mr. Crisp's valuation fair or unfair?

HOGGARD. Of course it's fair.

JACOB. Then why do you object to another valuer?

HOGGARD *(cornered)*. Eh? Look here, Fletcher, you parsons do not understand business. You can't. It isn't in your way.

JACOB. Well, if business means taking advantage of your neighbour, I'm very glad it isn't in my way. Come, you'll help me to give poor Mrs. Bristow her just rights? Yes, you will.

(Putting his hand on HOGGARD'S shoulder.)

We are what they call professors of religion ; let us act up to what we preach—don't let us say one thing with our lips and another with our lives.

HOGGARD *(uneasy, shuffling away from JACOB)*. Look here, Fletcher, you're my minister, but I won't be preached to on week-days. Sunday is the day for preaching.

JACOB. Yes, but every day is the day for practice. *(After a pause, very firmly.)* I cannot sign that deed, Mr. Hoggard.

HOGGARD. What? You break your word ! You

—dare—you forget who I am, you forget that I can turn you out of house and home, and—and—I will, too,—you—you——

(Spluttering with anger, unable to contain himself, then changing to a soft wheedling tone.)

Come now, Fletcher, it isn't to our interest to quarrel. Come now, you stick to your bargain, and I'll raise my pew-subscription to fifty pounds a year.

JACOB. Thank you, Mr. Hoggard, I'm much obliged to you for offering it to me, because it shows me that Mr. Crisp's valuation must be very unfair; but I don't quite see my way to taking money for betraying my trust.

Enter LETTY in outdoor clothes, a pretty country-girl about twenty-one. HOGGARD stands, pale and venomous, speechless for a few moments.

HOGGARD. Very well, sir. I have half-supported you all these years, and this is your return for my kindness, you beggarly conscientious pauper.

(LETTY runs to her father and throws her arms round his neck.)

JACOB. Not quite a pauper, Mr. Hoggard. I'm so rich that I don't need to covet from the widow and the fatherless.

LETTY *(to HOGGARD indignantly)*. How dare you insult my father? How dare you?

(JACOB quiets LETTY.)

HOGGARD *(to JACOB)*. Very well, sir. If you're as

rich as all that you won't need any more help from me, so I discontinue my twenty pounds a year pew-rent from this time ; and I warn you, the first chance I get, the first slip you make, out of our chapel and out of this house you go, both of you. (*Exit.*)

LETTY. Father, you shall not endure it. Why didn't you get very angry with him ?

JACOB. My dear, he isn't worth it.

LETTY. Oh, how I hate him ! How sick I am of it all !

(*Throwing her hat and cloak off on chair.*)

JACOB. Sick of what, dear ?

LETTY. Of this silly town, and our silly people. Everything in Steepleford is so commonplace, and so respectable, and nothing ever happens, and you and I are buried under it all ! Oh, how I wish that something would happen ! Anything ! Anything !

JACOB. Well, there's the Sunday school treat to-morrow.

LETTY. Yes, but that's only buns and milk and water. Oh, I wish—I wish—I wish—oh daddy, I'm so tired of this dull, stupid life ! I wish something would happen to take me out of it.

JACOB. Well, dear, I suppose you will be taken out of it when—George has saved up enough money.

LETTY. Now you know you're talking nonsense, daddy.

JACOB. I thought, dear, that George—eh ? He's very fond of you, Letty.

LETTY. Is he? Well, I can't help people falling in love with me. There's no Act of Parliament against it, and if people will do these foolish things they must take the consequences.

JACOB. Then if George—you wouldn't like—eh, Letty?

LETTY. I shouldn't like to—to leave you, daddy. But, oh, I should like to leave Steepleford.

JACOB. Leave Steepleford!

LETTY. Yes, and go about with an organ and a monkey, or a waxwork show, or a shooting-gallery, or anything that's exciting, and not quite respectable. You know you could grind the organ, daddy, eh?

JACOB (*smiling*). Well, that would be easier work than grinding out sermons.

LETTY. Yes, and so much better fun. And I'd teach the monkey its tricks, and wear a pretty dress, and go round with the hat.

JACOB. I think we should get a few coppers.

LETTY. Yes, and see lots of life. (*Clapping her hands.*) Oh daddy, do say "Yes." (*Very animated.*)

JACOB (*sits—aside*). How like she grows to her aunt. (*Troubled.*) (*Glances at picture.*)

LETTY. What are you thinking of, daddy?

JACOB. Of your aunt, Letty.

LETTY. Oh, do tell me about her. You've promised me so many times.

JACOB. Not now, darling, another time.

LETTY (*looking up at portrait*). How happy she looks.

JACOB. Yes, there. (*Sighs.*) She changed afterwards.

LETTY. 'Is it a love story, daddy?

JACOB. Yes, with a sad ending.

LETTY (*very animated*). A love story with a sad ending. Oh, do tell me! Do tell me!

GEORGE KINGSMILL, *a young farmer, opens door, stands nervously at it, not liking to come in.*

JACOB. George! Come in, my lad.

GEORGE (*embarrassed*). Good - morning, Mr. Fletcher. Good - morning, Miss Letty. I—I—hope
—I— (*Stops confused.*)

JACOB. Sit down, George.

LETTY (*going*). Yes, sit down, Mr. Kingsmill. I know I'm in the way, so I'll go.

GEORGE (*rising*). No, Miss Fletcher, don't go. I came on purpose——

LETTY. To have a chat with daddy, of course you did.

GEORGE. No—no, indeed, I—I——

LETTY. Why, what else could you have come for? I'll be very good, and run away, and won't disturb you once.

(*Runs off laughing, GEORGE following her with hungry eyes.*)

GEORGE. She always runs away the moment I

come ! Oh Mr. Fletcher, I can't help it. I know I'm a great fool, but I'm mad with heartache for her ! One morning when she was going to school—it's nine years ago now—she dropped her red comforter out of mischief, and I picked it up and gave it to her, and then she ran away and blew me a kiss out of mischief, and ever since then I've thought of nobody but her. If I live a hundred years I shall never love anybody but her. She's more to me than light to my eyes. She's more than life to me. I'm stifled when I try to speak to her—when she touches my hand it goes through me like sweet fire ; you don't know how much I love her—I'd die for her, and she doesn't care a pin's head for me. *(Sobbing.)*

And so I've come to say " Good-bye " to her before I leave England.

JACOB. Good-bye ! Leave England !

GEORGE. Yes. Farming's been bad work lately. I'm going to Australia to try my luck there.

JACOB. Going to Australia ! Well, George, we shall be sorry to lose you, but perhaps you are right. There's more breathing-room out there. But Letty——

GEORGE. Oh Mr. Fletcher, if she would but give me a word of hope before I go ! If she'd only say that some day she might turn to me, I'd work so hard for her. Will you say a good word for me, Mr. Fletcher ?

JACOB. Why, so I have, but love-making's a sort

of broth that too many cooks very easily spoil. But I'll call her, and you shall speak for yourself.

(Goes to door and calls.)

Letty !

GEORGE *(desperately)*. Do you think I stand any chance, sir?

JACOB. Why not? Letty's young yet, and she doesn't know her own mind. Keep up your courage—speak to her as you have been speaking to me, and I don't think she can find it in her heart to refuse you. Here she is.

LETTY *enters demurely*.

LETTY *(demurely)*. Is your gossip over, daddy?

JACOB. Yes, dear. We've been talking of you; haven't we, George? You know, dear—I think, that is, George thinks—well, George will tell you what he thinks.

(Going.)

LETTY. Where are you going, daddy?

JACOB. I'm going to—to look after the chickens.

LETTY. Shan't I look after them, daddy?

JACOB *(quickly)*. No, no. *(Aside to GEORGE.)*
Speak up, George, don't be frightened, and——

(Looking out of window.)

(Aloud.) That little bantam's fighting again! I really must lock him up.

(Exit quickly.)

GEORGE. Letty, you know what I want to say to you—but the words won't come.

LETTY. Oh, I'm so sorry! A dictionary! I'll fetch you a dictionary. (*Goes up to bookcase.*)

GEORGE. Letty, don't tease me. (*Meets her.*)
Don't you know what I've come to tell you?

LETTY (*pretending to be puzzled*). No, I cannot imagine. Is it about old Dubleton's cough?

(*Comes down.*)

GEORGE. This isn't a joking matter for me, Letty!

LETTY. No, it's very serious. Lydia and I are making him some flannels for the winter.

GEORGE (*maddened*). Letty, I'm dying with thirst——

LETTY. And there's nothing but milk in the house.

GEORGE. I'm dying with thirst for your love, Letty, and, God forgive you! you laugh at me.

(*Taking up his hat and rushing off.*)

LETTY (*genuinely penitent, stops him*). No, no, Mr. Kingsmill, stay. It's wicked of me to torment you, but it isn't I, it's the little bird of mischief inside me; but indeed—indeed I feel very much honoured by your love, and I wish I could love you back again.

GEORGE. And—won't you—can't you?

(*Takes her hands.*)

LETTY. I don't know. I haven't tried. You see I have scarcely had any offers yet, and I should like to refuse a lot before I quite make up my mind.

GEORGE. Oh Letty, if you had the choice of a thousand men you wouldn't find one who could love you as I do ! Letty, I am going away from England for years—for years——

LETTY. I'm so sorry ; why are you going ?

GEORGE. Let me go to make a home for you, Letty. I will work so hard for you, as faithfully as Jacob served for Rachel, and all the years of waiting will seem but a day for the love I bear you. Don't send me away in despair ; give me something—yes, that little coral necklace you wear,—give it to me that I may keep in dear remembrance of you, and in the hope that one day you may learn to love me, and be my wife,—yes, give it to me.

(LETTY takes off necklace, is about to give it to

GEORGE, then puts it back.)

LETTY. No, it would be cruel to bid you hope when—when I know it is impossible.

GEORGE. Letty, a few months ago, when you kissed that bunch of violets and gave them to me to wear, you did love me a little then ?

LETTY. Oh, forgive me, Mr. Kingsmill, it was very wrong of me to encourage you.

GEORGE. But tell me the truth. You did love me a little then ?

LETTY. Yes, perhaps I did (*sighs*)—then.

GEORGE. And now ? What has come between us ? Who has stolen your heart from me ? You don't answer !

LETTY. You have no right to ask——

GEORGE. Then there is somebody?

LETTY. I don't know. Oh Mr. Kingsmill, I'm not worthy of your great love! I'm only a foolish flighty girl, and whatever happens to me I shall bring no happiness to them that love me. Go away and forget me! I mean it—forget me!

GEORGE. Is that your last word to me, Letty?

LETTY. Yes, forget me; it will be better for you. Go away and forget me.

(GEORGE goes to door, looks at her with passionate longing.)

GEORGE. When my heart forgets to beat I shall forget you, Letty. (Exit rapidly.)

LETTY. How good and true he is! How safe and sure of happiness I should be if I were his wife! While he was speaking I felt I almost loved him; and yet, how different he is from Eustace—Eustace Fanshawe; and he loves me too—at least he said so the other night. What am I saying?

(Goes to window.)

Oh, if I had but the courage to see him no more. If I dared but refuse to meet him. Oh, to be loved by these two men, and to feel that I shall leave the good and choose the evil!

LYDIA enters, speaking off.

LYDIA. You can wait in here.

FANSHAWE *enters, a handsome, reckless, nonchalant military man about forty.* LETTY *starts back in confusion.* LYDIA *noticing LETTY's confusion.*

LYDIA. This gentleman wants to see the Minister. I don't know what's his business.

FANSHAWE. That's my business. Will you tell Mr. Fletcher I want to see him?

LETTY. My father is in the garden, Lydia. Will you tell him?

LYDIA. Oh yes, I'll tell him. (*Aside.*) And I'll tell the Minister too what Lot Burden told me this morning. (*Exit.*)

LETTY (*reproachful, pleased*). Why have you come here?

FANSHAWE. To see you, Letty! Are you angry?

LETTY. Yes, very angry.

FANSHAWE. Well, then, I came to see your father and give him a ten-pound note for his charities. I know it's a very bad excuse, but it was the best I could think of, and I was determined to see you.

LETTY (*pleased*). Even if it cost you ten pounds?

FANSHAWE. If it cost a thousand—a million!

LETTY. Well, then, you have seen me. Good-morning.

FANSHAWE. Stay! Why were you not in the Lovers' Walk last evening?

LETTY. Because I chose to stay at home.

FANSHAWE. You will be there to-night?

LETTY. No, Captain Fanshawe, I shall not meet you again.

FANSHAWE. Very well, don't. I'll meet you instead. Where's the harm?

LETTY. The harm is I have not told my father.

(*Going.*)

FANSHAWE. Wait. You shall not go. You *will* be there to-night?

LETTY. No, it is the Dorcas meeting.

(*Turns.*)

FANSHAWE. Deuce take the Dorcas meeting! To-morrow?

LETTY. No, it's our Sunday school treat.

FANSHAWE. Ah, I'm fond of Sunday school treats. I shall be there.

LETTY. Captain Fanshawe, I forbid you.

(*Indignantly.*)

FANSHAWE. Why, so you shall, when you do it in that pretty way; but all the same I shall come. Where do you hold this treat?

LETTY (*after a pause*). Down the river at the ferry, and across to Rodimore Woods.

FANSHAWE. How lucky! I shall be there fishing to-morrow.

LETTY. Captain Fanshawe, you must not come unless you ask my father's consent.

FANSHAWE. I never ask anybody's consent. I always do as I please. What time do you break up to-morrow night?

LETTY. I don't know. About sunset, I suppose.

FANSHAWE (*coming close to her, whispering in her ear*). Suppose by any chance you happened to loiter behind the rest, I shall be in the woods; suppose by any chance you happen to lose your way, I shall be sure to find you; suppose we thought it pleasant to row back to Steepleford in the twilight, I shall have my boat there just above the ferry. You will, little witch, you will, Letty?

LETTY. No, indeed, I shall not. (*Going.*)

FANSHAWE. You will! You must! You shall!

(*Seizing her, kisses her hand passionately.*)

I'll bet you a hundred kisses to one you will.

JACOB *has entered, stern and distressed.*

JACOB. Sir, who are you, and what business have you in my house?

(*LETTY stands covered with shame.*)

FANSHAWE. Your daughter had the misfortune to get stranded on the sandbank in the river a few days ago, and I had the pleasure of rescuing her, and——

JACOB (*sternly*). And does that give you the right to come here and treat her with this freedom and disrespect?

(*Takes up FANSHAWE'S hat, which is on table.*)

My daughter and I are not of your class; we do not desire your acquaintance.

(*Giving him the hat.*)

Your hat, sir ! When I wish to see you in my house again I will send for you.

FANSHAWE (*aside*). I'll take your daughter's opinion on the matter, my friend. (*Exit.*)

JACOB. Letty !

LETTY (*who has stood shamefaced since JACOB'S entrance*). Father, do not speak to me. Let me go to my room.

JACOB. No, my dear ; hear me first. You asked me for your aunt Letty's history just now. Look at that picture ; she was once as happy and as lovely and innocent as you are now. A few years and she came back to die in our arms, her heart broken, her beauty and innocence gone.

LETTY (*frightened, ashamed*). Oh father, no more ; say no more. I have been foolish, but not wicked ; and see (*taking off coral necklace*), a good man asked me for my love this morning. Look ! send this to George Kingsmill, and tell him that if he will give me time to learn to love him, and to grow worthy of his love, I will be his wife one day.

JACOB (*clasping her*). My Letty ! My own ! You make me so happy, for now I know you are safe.

CURTAIN.

(*One day elapses between Acts I. and II.*)

ACT II

SCENE I

RODIMORE WOODS, *a glade with sunset through the trees. The river at back, with boat.*

LEESON, FANSHAWE'S *valet*, is discovered looking off, with fishing-rod in hand, disjoining it.

LEESON. What's the governor want dodging after these Sunday school brats for? Sunday schools ain't much in his way ! *(Goes up, takes up creel.)*
If ever there was a devil on the face of this earth, it's Captain Eustace Fanshawe !

FANSHAWE *enters hurriedly. Looking off.*

FANSHAWE. Put down that cursed tackle, anywhere, throw it into the river.

(LEESON throws it off.)

Come here. *(Takes letter out of pocket.)* You see that young lady a little to the left of those children.

(Points off.)

LEESON. Yes, sir.

FANSHAWE (*giving letter*). Take this note to her. Wait till you have a chance of giving it to her alone. . . . There, she's moving away from the others, make haste !
(*Exit LEESON with note.*)

I won't give her up. I can't ! she's too charming ! If she were only a fiftieth part as charming, I might screw up the half-farthing's worth of virtue I have left and run away from her, but as she is—No ! (*Looks off.*) Ah, she's seen him ; he's given her the note ; she's reading it ! She'll come ! She'll come ! Give her up, not I ! When a man has been as badly used by womankind as I have been, damn it all ! he owes it to his own sense of justice to be revenged on womankind as often as he can. (*Chuckling.*) I don't think I shall get to be much *worse* than I am !

(*Sits at foot of tree.*)

And I might have been a good man, I suppose,—if I could have chosen my own father and mother, and if everything and every creature I've met, from my cradle upwards, hadn't pushed me to the bad. If, instead of meeting that other woman ten years ago, I had met with Letty Fletcher—— What's the good of wishing. After all, there's a great comfort in being out-and-out wicked—it's like being soaked through, you can defy the elements.

(CHILDREN'S *laughter heard off.*)

FANSHAWE (*rises*). Hillo ! (*Looks off.*)
Her father with a pack of children at his heels !

(*Laughter heard off.*)

Yes, laugh and play! You turned me out of your house yesterday, you may find your daughter has left it to-morrow! (Exit.)

CHILDREN *laugh. . . . Pause.* JACOB *enters with a child on his back and a dozen clinging round him. They speak as they enter. JACOB stands panting and wiping forehead.*

1ST CHILD. Now me, Mr. Fletcher! Now me!

2ND CHILD. No, me! me! you're my donkey now.

1ST CHILD. No, it's my turn now. Be my donkey, Mr. Fletcher! (JACOB *sits at foot of tree.*)

JACOB. I think I'm everybody's donkey to-day, and I'm getting more kicks than ha'pence.

(CHILDREN'S *voices heard off at a distance singing Tallis's evening hymn.*)

Why, listen! (Looks off.)

They're breaking up. The ferryman leaves at twilight! Now run back, all of you, or else you'll lose the ferry, and have to stay in the woods all night.

1ST CHILD. Ain't you coming with us, Mr. Fletcher?

JACOB. No! I'm going to walk back.

2ND CHILD. Oh, do come back with us and be our donkey!

1ST CHILD. Yes, do, Mr. Fletcher. I like you on week-days so much better than Sundays.

JACOB. Why, how's that?

1ST CHILD. Why, on Sundays you preach sermons ever so long, and on week-days you give us sweets and oranges.

JACOB. Loaves and fishes ! Loaves and fishes !

LETTY *appears, looks on.*

(JACOB *taking oranges from pocket and bowling them off.*)

JACOB. There, run back to the others ! And wish them all good-night for me.

(*Bowls oranges off ; CHILDREN run off after them. LETTY comes down, takes JACOB'S arm as he turns to go.*)

LETTY. Father, let me walk home with you.

JACOB. Six miles is too far for you after such a day. Besides, George will be waiting for you at the station ! You haven't seen anything of him ?

LETTY. No !

(*The hymn in the distance ceases.*)

JACOB. I suppose he hasn't come back from London yet. What a pity he had started yesterday before I could tell him the good news ! And what a surprise it will be for him when he gets home, and finds my letter and your necklace waiting for him, won't it ?

LETTY (*listlessly*). I daresay it will make him happy.

JACOB. Happy? He won't be able to contain his joy. (*Taking out large old-fashioned watch.*) Well, I must be starting.

LETTY. Father, let me come home with you.

JACOB. No, no, my dear! I tell you it's too far, and I want to think over my sermon. And, besides, my walking saves the sixpence train-fare. They're just breaking up—go back to them, you'll be home before I am—and make haste—and (*going*) if you should happen to find somebody waiting for you at home, you'll make him welcome till I come, won't you? There, make haste—look, they're crossing the ferry, I must be starting. (*Exit.*)

LETTY. He would not take me with him! What can I do? (*Takes out FANSHAWÉ'S letter, reads.*)

"I must see you, if only for a moment. I am waiting for you along the river below the ferry. It is the last time we shall ever meet, I must and will see you" . . . (*Crushes letter*). No, I will not see him—it is wrong and cruel of him to ask me, I must not love him. I will go back to the others!

(*FANSHAWÉ comes from behind trees. LETTY is going.*)

LETTY. No! I will go after my father, and show him this letter.

FANSHAWÉ (*comes down and intercepts her*). Where are you going?

LETTY (*trembling, afraid*). After my father.

FANSHAWÉ. You shan't go until you've heard me.

LETTY (*shrinking away*). No, Captain Fanshawe, I must not, I will not.

FANSHAWE (*quickly*). I have something to tell you.

(*This scene to be played quickly, passionately.*)

LETTY. What can you have to tell me?

FANSHAWE. That I love you desperately, madly, beyond all telling, and I will kill myself before I will give you up.

LETTY. How can you talk so wickedly?

FANSHAWE. Because I am wicked, and because I mean it. Yes, I tell you plainly, I am no saint, but I love you, as man never loved woman before, and you shall not go from this place till you say you love me. . . . Tell me so, say it—say you love me!

(*Very imperatively, seizing her hands.*)

LETTY. I cannot—I do not love you.

FANSHAWE. You do love me. I know it, and you know it! Say you love me! Do you hear! Say you love me! (*His face close to hers, looking at her commandingly.*)

LETTY. Why do you torture me? I will not say it, it would not be true.

FANSHAWE. It is true! I won't hear another word from those lips, and I will not let you go till you say it.

LETTY. Captain Fanshawe, I have promised to be the wife of George Kingsmill. . . .

(CHILDREN'S voices are heard singing another hymn at a greater distance. The singing grows fainter during the following scene.)

FANSHAWE. Indeed ! And when did you promise that ?

LETTY. Yesterday morning.

FANSHAWE (*very tauntingly*). To please your father ! Good girl ! She does as her father tells her ; she takes her love and she gives it away to the man he chooses for her. Good God ! And I thought at last I had met a woman who could love me as I love her.

LETTY (*piteously*). You should not speak to me like this.

FANSHAWE. How should I speak to you ? I love you ; I would have taken you from these dull fools, and lifted you to the station you were meant for. I would have given you everything that heart could wish for. I would have spent my whole life in making you happy. I am not a good man, but you could have made me one—your love would have saved me ; I had staked all my hopes upon it. I had built upon it ; and now you fling me aside, and tell me to hang or drown myself, or go to the devil any way I choose.

(*Singing ceases.*)

LETTY. Oh, you will break my heart ! I did not know you loved me so much ! I never dared to hope to be your wife. Oh, what am I saying ? I

do not love you. I must not—Captain Fanshawe, let me go !
(*Going, he stops her.*)

FANSHAWE. Tell me once, Letty, tell me once before we part for ever that you love me, and I will set you free—say, “Eustace, I love you” (*very imploringly*).

LETTY. I—I—(*madly*)—Oh, you know I love you—(*shrinking from him*). What have I said?

(FANSHAWE *embraces her.*)

FANSHAWE. Ah, I knew it !

LETTY (*struggling*). Let me go—you gave me your word !

FANSHAWE (*releasing her*). Go, then, and marry the man you do not love—Go ! . . .

LETTY (*going aside, and looking off*). They’ve all gone ! The ferryman isn’t there ! (*alarmed*).

FANSHAWE. No ! and it would be too late now to catch the train.

LETTY. I must run after my father, I shall catch him if I make haste.
(*Going.*)

FANSHAWE. No, I have my boat here ! (*Looks at watch.*) I’ll row you up to the junction, and we shall catch the last train to Steepleford—

(LETTY *hesitates.*)

You don’t trust me ! On my honour I will take you safely to the station !

(*Offers hand to help her into boat.*)

LETTY. Indeed I—I . . . (*struggling, hesitating, looking piteously at him*).

FANSHAWE. Come, it's for the last time ; you shall not refuse me.

LETTY (*getting into boat*). Yes, the last time ! I have given my promise to George Kingsmill.

FANSHAWE (*in boat*). Keep it by all means (*grimly*). (*Pushing off with oar.*)

(*Boat glides off. Scene changes to Railway Station.—During the scene, which commenced with lights full up, stage has grown gradually quite dusk.*)

SCENE II

OUSEBRIDGE JUNCTION

Enter HOGGARD with umbrella, followed by LOT BURDEN.

HOGGARD (*looking at watch*). Twenty minutes to eight ; a quarter of an hour to wait. Well, I think we've done a good stroke of business to-day—eh, Lot ?

PORTER *enters with a box, puts it down, and exit on to platform.*

LOT. Yes, sir, a capital stroke of business.

HOGGARD. Did you notice how I twisted him round my finger ?

LOT. Well, I think you had the best of the bargain.

HOGGARD. I should think I had, Lot. The fool ! That bit of land is worth five hundred pounds.

LOT. And you got it for two hundred and eighty by just telling a few—a few—um—um—stretchers.

HOGGARD (*sitting on box*). That's what I call business.

LOT. You're a shrewd, clever man, sir, and no mistake.

HOGGARD. Well, I think if a man wanted to get the better of Sam Hoggard, he'd have to get up uncommonly early in the morning. That reminds me, we must have an allowance on that last lot of hides from Birkett.

LOT. Well, sir, they're in splendid condition and very cheap at the money.

HOGGARD. Then we must get it out of the Railway Company. Send in a claim for damage in transit.

LOT. How much must I claim, sir?

HOGGARD. Five pounds. We must be sharp in business nowadays. Business is business. What does the Bible say? "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings" !

LOT. Yes, sir.

HOGGARD. You may as well claim *seven* pounds. The Railway Company can stand it. Besides, it's no sin to get the better of a Railway Company.

(*Going to ticket-office.*)

They're always robbing the public—and Lot——

LOT. Yes, sir.

HOGGARD. I raised your salary yesterday morning, not because you're worth it—but—well, just to encourage you.

LOT. Thank you, sir.

HOGGARD. If you happen to see Fletcher, you might tell him that my affairs are in rather a bad way, and he'd better make sure of what I offer, money down. Frighten him a little, do you see, Lot? (*winking and nudging* LOT).

LOT. Oh, very well, sir, I will.

HOGGARD. Yes, tell him I've been launching out, speculating and trying to do too much business. He's fighting shy of his bargain, and wants to have a new valuer for Mrs. Bristow.

LOT. Does he now, sir? How very unbusiness-like.

HOGGARD. I can't understand his change; he was willing enough to take Crisp's valuation last week. Somebody must have been putting him up to this.

LOT. Do you think so, sir? I wonder who it can be?

HOGGARD. *You* never mention my affairs to him, do you?

LOT. Oh dear no, sir. I hope you know me better than that.

HOGGARD. I had to talk to him pretty sharp yesterday morning.

LOT. Did you find him very obstinate, sir?

HOGGARD. As obstinate as a pig. Couldn't move him.

LOT. And he's generally very easy about money-matters.

HOGGARD. As green as grass. That's what I reckoned upon. Oh! he'll come round I daresay. If he doesn't, I'll make Bethel too hot for him. I'll turn him out. You know, Lot, when I set my back up, I'm a very nasty customer.

LOT. Yes, sir, so you are, a *very* nasty customer.

HOGGARD. But I want to be nice and amiable and pleasant. So you can just give Fletcher a hint that he'd better close with me at once. (*Taking out watch.*) Ten minutes to eight.

LOT. Oh, we've got plenty of time, sir, the seven forty up-express ain't gone yet, and the Steepleford train can't start until after she's left.

HOGGARD. Oh well, I'll get our tickets. You stick to me, Lot, and I shall make something of you.

(*Exit into booking-office.*)

LOT (*looking after him*). Yes, you'll make me as big a rascal and liar as you are, if I don't take care. I know you, Sam Hoggard! If I were to brush you the wrong way, you'd turn me off without a character, and I might starve. Yes, I'll keep in with you as long as I'm obliged, but if ever I do get a chance of paying you back, Mr. Samuel Hoggard——

(*Exit after HOGGARD.*)

FANSHAWE, *with LETTY'S cloak on his arm, enters, followed by LETTY.*

FANSHAWE. I have brought you safely, you see.

LETTY. Thank you ; I will not trouble you any further.

FANSHAWE. You forget I am going to Steepleford too, and I will not part from you until we are there.

LETTY. I would rather go alone, indeed I would.

FANSHAWE. Will you never learn to trust me?

LETTY. Yes, yes, indeed I do—it is not that ! But if any of my father's congregation should see me with you——

FANSHAWE. What would they do?

LETTY. They would *talk*.

FANSHAWE. Would they? It would be a sin to take away their *one* pleasure in life.

LETTY. They have already seen me with you.

FANSHAWE. And if they should see me once more, would there be so much harm in it? To-morrow I shall have said good-bye to you for ever. You shall not cheat me out of this one last hour.

LETTY. Let me wait on the other side, then. Oh, you make me so wretched. I cannot bear the thought that I am driving you to be a bad man.

FANSHAWE. Oh, I don't want any driving. I'm bad enough as it is, but with your love, I would have tried to be as good as you (*Letty looks distressed*)—or I would have made you as bad as I am. However, that's all past now.

LETTY. Yes, all past (*crossing*), I must keep my promise—I must—— (*Exit on to platform.*)

FANSHAWE. Good ! if you want a woman to love you, tell her you're an infernal scoundrel, and threaten to go to the devil for her sake. I'm damned if I don't really begin to love the little witch.

Enter a PORTER—crosses stage.

(*To PORTER*). What time does the train start for Steepleford?

PORTER. Seven fifty-five, sir, but she'll be a little bit late to-night. The seven forty up-express ain't in yet, and the branch can't start till after she's gone.

(*Lifts box to shoulder.*)

Are you going to Steepleford, sir?

FANSHAWE. Yes.

PORTER. *Second* train on the other side, sir. Don't get into the *first*, or you'll get took up to London by mistake. (*Exit to platform with box.*)

(FANSHAWE *suddenly struck with man's last words.*)

FANSHAWE. Get taken up to London by mistake ! By Jove ! The devil's own luck ! I'll do it !

(*To LEESON who enters.*)

Leeson, you're just in time. Get me two first-class tickets for Steepleford ; bring them over to the other side, you'll find me with that lady. The *first* train that comes up is the London express ; put us into it

by mistake ; bundle us in, and take care we don't find out we're in the wrong train, you understand.

(Looks at LEESON.)

LEESON. Perfectly, sir. You're going to Steepleford, and in the hurry you get into the London train by mistake.

(Crossing to booking-office.)

FANSHAWE. Good—and Leeson, there's twenty pounds for you if you don't bungle it.

LEESON *(touching hat)*. Thank you, sir.

FANSHAWE. When we get up to London and I find out you've put us in the wrong train, I shall bully you like a pickpocket.

LEESON. Of course you will, sir, for my carelessness.

(Going.)

FANSHAWE. And, Leeson—when we get to the hotel—that lady is my wife.

LEESON. All right, sir.

(Exit into booking-office.)

FANSHAWE. She's mine ! Once get her up to London, she can't come back. Yes, my little bird, you're in the trap.

(Exit on to platform.)

LOT enters from booking-office and sees him.

LOT. Why, there's that Captain Fanshawe ! *(Goes to window.)* Why, and there's Miss Letty too ; they're walking up and down the platform together ! I wonder what Mr. Fletcher would say to Miss Letty's being seen in public with such a man as that Captain Fanshawe.

(*Turns towards booking-office as FANSHAWE'S man comes hastily out, tickets in hand, and knocks against him.*)

LEESON. Out of the way, there's a good fellow.

LOT (*recognising him*). You're Captain Fanshawe's man, ain't you?

LEESON. Yes—I am; what of it?

LOT. Where's your master taking Miss Fletcher?

LEESON. Why, home to Steepleford, of course; look, here are the tickets! (*Shows tickets.*) Oh, Mr. Fletcher knows all about it!

LOT. Mr. Fletcher knows all about it?

LEESON. Yes, he does—so don't you worry!

(*Exit, slamming door in LOT's face.*)

LOT. If they're going to Steepleford, perhaps I'd better not interfere, and——

HOGGARD *enters from booking-office without umbrella.*

HOGGARD. Well, Lot, is that our train just come in?

LOT. No, sir, that's the London express. (*Aside.*) I'd better keep him from seeing them, or he'll bully Mr. Fletcher, and make a lot of mischief.

(*HOGGARD is going to platform door.*)

Our train can't start till after the express is gone, sir. Why, you haven't got your umbrella, sir.

HOGGARD. I must have left it in the booking-office. Just get it for me, will you?

LOT (*aside*). If I can only keep him from seeing them.
(*Exit into booking-office.*)

(HOGGARD goes up to window, looks out.)

HOGGARD. Why, bless my soul! that surely must be Fletcher's girl getting into that carriage.

(*Feeling for his spectacles.*)

Re-enter LOT BURDEN *from booking-office with umbrella.*

LOT (*aside*). I'll keep him on this side till the last moment. (*Aloud.*) Here's your umbrella, sir.

(*Gives it.*)

HOGGARD. I thought I saw that girl of Fletcher's getting into a first-class carriage just now with a gentleman.

LOT. Oh dear no, sir. Miss Fletcher wouldn't be travelling first-class; it couldn't be her.

HOGGARD. No, I suppose not; I must have been mistaken.
(*Exit upon platform.*)

LOT (*rushes up to window*). They've gone! Yes, they've gone by the express! She's run away with that rascal to London.
(*Exit upon platform.*)

BELL—*Change.*

SCENE III

THE MINISTER'S STUDY as in Act I

An old garden-hat of LETTY's lying on a chair.

Discover LYDIA laying supper-things. Cloth on table.

LYDIA. Nearly nine o'clock, and not a sign of the Minister and Letty.

Enter JACOB with a bottle of wine and a plucked, uncooked chicken.

Oh, here you are at last. Why, what have you got there?

JACOB. That's a chicken and a bottle of port-wine.

LYDIA. Oh, what's that for?

JACOB. Why, for supper to be sure.

LYDIA. I should like to know where the money's to come from for such luxuries!

JACOB. Well, it is very extravagant, I know; but you mustn't be angry with me this once, Lydia. You see, this is George's first visit to my house as my future son-in-law, and I want to give him a warm welcome for Letty's sake. That's a fine bird, isn't it?

LYDIA (*examining fowl, probing it with her fingers*).

Ah! she may have been a fine bird in her time, but she's like me, she's seen her best days.

JACOB. No, she's at an end of her best days, but I hope your best days are to come, Lydia.

LYDIA (*grunts*). Ugh! (*probing the fowl*) she'll take a lot of basting to make her tender.

JACOB. Then she must have a lot of basting, Lydia. Where's Letty?

LYDIA. Didn't she come in with you?

JACOB. No, she came by train with the children. She ought to have been home an hour ago.

LYDIA. She hasn't come then.

JACOB. I daresay she's popped in somewhere. And George Kingsmill, hasn't he come yet?

LYDIA. No, not a blessed soul has been near the house since you left it.

JACOB. Ah, I suppose George hasn't got back from London.

LYDIA. What's he gone to London for?

JACOB. Why, about his farm. He went straight away yesterday morning when he left this house. So he doesn't know that Letty has promised to be his wife. How pleased he will be when he gets home and learns the good news!

LYDIA. Good news! Ugh!

(*Grunts, dissatisfied.*)

JACOB. Yes, I call it good news when two young people love one another and agree to take each other for better or worse.

(*Going up to window and drawing the blind a little aside with a mere shade of anxiety.*)

I wonder where she is !

LYDIA. Well, I suppose she'll get married to somebody or the other sooner or later, and if we are to have a heap of sweethearting and courting in the house we may as well get it over and done with it !

(*At table.*)

JACOB (*comes down*). Well, I don't suppose George will wish to marry her for a year or two. Not that I shall stand in their way. Letty is twenty-one, and she must do as she pleases. I only want to see her happy, and there's a deal too much prudence about marriage nowadays. Young folks are afraid to marry because they can't keep a big house and a lot of servants, and so they wait till all their best days are gone ; but I say to young people, "Don't wait till the sun is going down ; marry each other while you're young, and enjoy the morning of life together and toil side by side." That's what I say.

LYDIA. Ugh ! (*Snatching up fowl.*) I suppose you'll want some bread-sauce with this animal.

JACOB. Yes, Lydia, plenty of bread-sauce, and make haste, because Letty and George will soon be here. (*Going up to window—sees LETTY'S hat lying on the chair, picks it up, looks at it fondly.*)

The untidy little puss !

LYDIA. Yes, she's always leaving her things in your study. Give it to me—I'll hang it up.

JACOB. No—let it be—I like to have it in the room—
(*Puts it down on chair.*)

and Lydia——

LYDIA. Well !

JACOB. One fowl isn't much between four hungry people. Do you think it would be very extravagant if we were to have one of those nice custard-puddings of yours,—just for this once, Lydia, because you know this is a very special occasion, and it will only happen to me once in my life.

LYDIA. Well, I suppose I must humour you, but it will mean short commons for the next week.

JACOB. Never mind—we must have a little feast to-night. I am so glad my Letty is going to marry the very man I should have chosen for her out of all the world. Ah ! how happy it would have made her mother, if she could have lived till now.

LYDIA. Ugh ! I suppose you'll want this creature stuffed.
(*Probing fowl.*)

JACOB. Yes, Lydia, plenty of stuffing and plenty of good gravy ; and, Lydia, gently with that poor bird—show a little respect to old age.

LYDIA. Ugh ! Well, I'll make the best of her, but don't you go buying poultry again, you leave that to me. (JACOB goes to cupboard, takes out corkscrew and wine-glasses, puts wine-glasses on table, draws cork of bottle. LYDIA goes to door.)

She ain't no chicken, she ain't.

(*Exit.*)

(JACOB *alone, goes to back table and takes off a vase of flowers, sets it in centre of supper-table; does all this with a pleased air of proprietorship, rubs his hands, looks at table pleased.*)

JACOB. Let me see, the last time we had a bottle of wine—when was the last time we had a bottle of wine? Oh, I remember, it was when Mr. Prabble sent me one for christening his twins. That was two years ago last February.

(*Taking up a wine-glass to re-arrange table.*)

LOT *enters hurriedly by a side door.*

LOT. Mr. Fletcher!

JACOB. Well, Lot, what is it?

LOT. Miss Letty, sir—do you know where she is?

JACOB. I left her to come home with the others from the ferry—why—what's the matter? Has—has——

LOT. Oh sir, it will break your heart, and I wish there was somebody else to tell you.

JACOB. Why! what do you mean? What's happened to her? Tell me quick, where is she?

LOT (*after a pause, very delicately*). She's run away to London with that rascal Captain Fanshawe.

(JACOB *drops the glass from his hand, and stands speechless for some moments.*)

JACOB. No—no—no— How do you know?

LOT. I happened to be at the junction, sir, and

I saw them on the other side. The London express came up, and they went away by it.

JACOB. You saw them go! You saw a man robbing me of my daughter, and you didn't cry, "Stop thief!"

LOT. I was on the wrong side, sir, and the train had started before I could stop them.

JACOB. You're sure there's no mistake? It was Letty you saw?

LOT. Oh sir, there's no mistake.

JACOB (*remembering*). Yes—yes—yes. Why he was making love to her here yesterday morning, here in my own house, and she did not repulse him. (*Starting up violently.*) The next train for London—when does it start?

LOT. There's no train till the morning, sir.

JACOB. Horses! I must get horses, and drive up to London after them!

LOT. Oh sir, you wouldn't reach London till late to-morrow morning.

JACOB. The telegraph—I'll telegraph and have them stopped!

LOT. The office is closed, sir.

JACOB. You should have stopped her! You should have dragged her away from him! Oh, Lot, what can I do? What can I do?

LOT. You can do nothing till the morning, sir.

JACOB. Nothing till the morning? I must! I must reach her to-night! I will! I will!

(Goes mechanically and takes his hat and coat off peg.)

I tell you I must reach her to-night, to-night—to-night, Lot, to-night! Oh!

(Throws coat in window, sits at table.)

Lot, her good name is gone. I shall never hold up my head again.

LOT. Don't say that, sir. We may perhaps keep it secret till you can find Miss Letty and bring her back; let's hope for the best. Oh sir, have patience, nobody knows of it.

JACOB. Nobody knows of it to-night, but to-morrow all the town will know that my Letty, my girl is—oh, if I could but reach her for a moment! If I could but whisper one word in her ear! I might yet save her! And I stay here, and can do nothing!

(Bursts into tears, continues sobbing for a few moments. LOT moves towards him with a sympathetic gesture. Taking LOT's hand.)

Thank you, Lot, for what you have done. You won't mention this to anybody?

LOT. Not to a living soul, sir. I'll have my tongue out before I breathe a syllable of it.

JACOB *(shakes hand)*. Thank you, Lot. Don't wait. I can bear it best alone. I'll go up to London to-morrow morning, and find her, and bring her back again—yes, to-morrow. Good-night, Lot.

LOT. Good-night, sir. I wish I could help you bear it, sir.

JACOB. Nobody can do that—nobody knows how much I loved her. *(Exit LOT.)*

(JACOB alone, stares around the room.)

JACOB. Gone! Gone! How shall I answer to her mother for her? Gone! *(Rises.)*

(Takes up LETTY'S old garden-hat, puts it down, happens to see picture of LETTY'S aunt, goes to it, turns its face to the wall, looks helplessly round the room—old, haggard, tearless.)

Gone! Gone! Gone! *(Sits.)*

GEORGE *(calls outside)*. Mr. Fletcher! Mr. Fletcher! where are you?

Enters with a quick, joyous, eager step.

GEORGE. Well, here I am you see! I got your letter, and I came on at once. I couldn't wait a moment! I've been waiting all these years for one word of love from her! Where is she? Why, what's the matter? Where is Letty? Does she expect me? Tell her I'm here! What has happened? You didn't expect me—you're upset. Where is she? Why don't you speak?

JACOB. George, she is—I cannot tell you— She is——

GEORGE. You have bad news. What is it? Tell me; I can bear it. Ah! She is dead!

JACOB. Would God she were. *(Rises.)*

GEORGE. Worse than death! There is but one thing worse than death. Is it *that*?

JACOB. You have said it.

(GEORGE *stands still for some moments, dazed, with one hand to his head, the other resting on back of chair; with a strong movement he swings chair behind him, comes down, stands with his hands clenching tablecloth; then in a cold hoarse voice*)—

GEORGE. Who is he? His name?

JACOB. It is too late. You cannot save her.

GEORGE. His name? I will know it. His name, I say!

JACOB. Why, what will you do?

GEORGE. I will kill him! As there is a heaven above us, I will kill him!

CURTAIN.

(*A month elapses between Acts II. and III.*)

ACT III

SCENE I

SITTING-ROOM AT THE MINISTER'S. FRONT SCENE.

Discover LYDIA showing in HOGGARD and PRABBLE.

PRABBLE is a little provincial grocer, very small, but very self-important.

LYDIA. The Minister's in his study. I'll tell him you're here.

PRABBLE. Miss Fletcher's not come home yet?

LYDIA. No, she hasn't.

HOGGARD. Not come home! How's that?

LYDIA. Because she's stayed away. *(Exit.)*

HOGGARD. Prabble, I have my suspicions about this girl's visit to London. *(Sits.)*

PRABBLE. Ah! London is a sink of iniquity. I lived there three months when I was a young man.

HOGGARD. I think as deacons of the chapel we ought to get from Fletcher some explanation of his daughter's absence.

PRABBLE. Yes, and another thing, Mr. Hoggard. I find the members of the congregation are going to the Stores, and I've asked Mr. Fletcher more than once to preach against them. I'm a grocer, and I've got eleven children, and how can I pay my rates and taxes and bring up my family if the Stores are allowed to undersell me, eh? I ask you that as a member of the great tax-paying middle classes.

HOGGARD. Very true, Prabble. The middle classes are the great backbone of this country. It's such men as you and I, Prabble, that are the source of England's greatness. We have made England what she is to-day. Oh, here is Fletcher.

Enter JACOB, looking broken and older than in last act.

LYDIA follows him in and busies herself about the room.

JACOB. Good-morning, Mr. Hoggard.

(Crosses to PRABBLE.)

Good-morning, Mr. Prabble.

HOGGARD. We've called to fix the evening for the missionary meeting next month.

JACOB. Any evening will suit me. *(Dreamy, listless, uninterested.)*

HOGGARD. Then we'll say Tuesday the 17th.

(Taking out pocket-book, making memorandum.)

That's settled. So your daughter has not returned yet?

JACOB (*a little confused and troubled*). No—no—I have not pressed her to come back, but she'll be home now in a day or two. Yes, she's sure to come home in a few days.

HOGGARD. She seems to like living in London.

LYDIA. Yes, and do you know why?

HOGGARD. No.

LYDIA. Because in London people mind their own business, and down here they're always poking their noses into their neighbour's.

HOGGARD. Oh!

PRABBLE. I was about to remark, Mr. Fletcher, that you have not yet denounced the Stores from the pulpit.

JACOB. Well, I don't see my way to make a pulpit-question of it, Mr. Prabble. Of course I always get my groceries from you, but I don't think I ought to interfere with the way my congregation spend their money.

PRABBLE. If I support your chapel, I expect you to get the congregation to support my shop. That's only fair. I've got to live, haven't I? Eh, Mr. Hoggard?

HOGGARD. You're quite right, Prabble? and that reminds me, Fletcher (*rises*), I have to complain about Sunday morning's sermon.

JACOB. What was the matter with it?

HOGGARD. Matter? Why, I timed it—it was barely thirty minutes.

PRABBLE. No. Give me a good old-fashioned

sermon, one that lasts an hour and a quarter. That was always the length of sermons when I was a boy. We don't get such sermons nowadays.

HOGGARD. Yes, to be sure. If I pay twenty pounds a year for my religion, I'm not going to be done out of it.

JACOB (*meekly*). I'm very sorry, gentlemen. To tell you the truth, I have not been very well the last week; but you shall have a longer one next Sunday.

LYDIA (*bursting in*). How do you expect to get good sermons when you come and worry the minister like this? Can't you see you're plaguing all the life and spirit out of him?

JACOB (*remonstratingly*). Lydia! Lydia! Hush!

LYDIA. I shan't hush. There, you go back to your study and leave them——

PRABBLE. We're just going. Good-morning, Mr. Fletcher. Come on, Mr. Hoggard. (*Exit.*)

HOGGARD (*as he is going, aside to JACOB*). You haven't done any more in Mrs. Bristow's affairs?

JACOB. I have a valuer coming down from London next week.

HOGGARD. Oh, very well. Good-morning. By the way, I hope you have taken means to ascertain the character of the people your daughter is staying with. Who are these friends of yours in London? Eh?

JACOB (*with great dignity*). That is my business, sir. You pay me for my sermons and you have a

right to call them in question ; but with regard to my daughter, I will answer for her where I am accountable. Good-morning.

(Turns away from him and goes to window.)

HOGGARD *(aside, looking at him)*. That girl's gone away for no good. There's something wrong, and I'll ferret it out before I'm much older. *(Exit.)*

JACOB *(to LYDIA)*. You see, it's no good, Lydia. It's safe to come out. They'll find that I don't know where she is, and then they'll guess the truth. You're quite sure there was no letter this morning.

LYDIA. Quite. I saw the postman go by.

JACOB. The second post will soon be here.

(Going up to window—anxiously looking out.)

LYDIA. There, come away from that window. I can't bear to see you standing there day after day waiting for a letter that never comes.

JACOB. The postman is late again, he ought to have been here before this. It's four weeks to-day since she left home. A whole month, and not a line when she knows my heart is breaking for her.

LYDIA. I can't understand her not writing. I always knew she was giddy and thoughtless, but I didn't think she was heartless and wicked.

JACOB. She isn't ! How dare you say so ? No ! there's some mistake. She'll write to-day, or perhaps she'll come home. Yes, she can't have the heart to stay away much longer. Lydia, was I very unkind to her when she was at home ?

LYDIA. Unkind! There never was a kinder father in the world.

JACOB. Oh no, I must have been very hard and cruel to her, or she would have written to me! Perhaps if I stopped in London another day I might have found her.

(Looking out of window.)

Ah, there's the postman! He's coming here! Yes, there's a letter at last! You go, Lydia—I dare not, for fear.

(Exit LYDIA.)

Oh, it must be from her—it must!

Re-enter LYDIA with letter.

Well, well, is it from her? Yes, it is—it is! Give it to me. *(Snatching letter from LYDIA.)* What did I tell you? I knew she would write!

(Eagerly opens letter, throws envelope on floor, reading.)

“TORQUAY, *Monday*.—Father, I am ashamed to write to you, and yet I must. What can you think of me? Oh, I can never dare to ask your forgiveness! I do not deserve it! I should have written before, but I waited till I could tell you that I was Captain Fanshawe's wife——

LYDIA. Go on, sir! Is she his wife?

JACOB *(reading)*. —“but there has been some delay in procuring the marriage-licence. However, it will be here at latest in a day or two——

LYDIA. Then the villain hasn't married her?

JACOB (*reading*). —“and I will write again the moment I am married. You are not to grieve over me ; you are to forget me, and think of me as dead.” (*Dropping his hands with the letter.*) Think of her as dead ! (*Sobbing, raising the letter to read again.*) —“Do not try to come to me—it would be useless, —I shall never dare to see you again. Oh my father, when I think how I have deceived you and brought shame upon you I am ready to go mad ! I can write no more.—Your heart-broken LETTY.” (*Sobbing.*) Think of her as dead ! Not try to come to her ! Ah, but I will though, and bring her home ! (*Looking again at letter.*) Torquay ; she doesn’t give her address in Torquay, but I shall be sure to find her.

Enter GEORGE KINGSMILL.

My hat and coat, Lydia ! I’ll start at once. I shall be sure to find her. (*Exit* LYDIA.)

GEORGE. You’ve heard from her ? You know where she is ?

JACOB. Yes, I am going to fetch her.

GEORGE. He’s left her ; he’s thrown her off ?

JACOB. No.

GEORGE. She’s with him still ? I’ll go with you and settle my account with him.

JACOB. What do you mean ?

GEORGE. I shall keep my word.

JACOB. No, George, vengeance is not ours. I

have been wronged more than you. My home is broken and all the pride and joy of my life taken from me, but I will leave my vengeance to Whom vengeance belongs.

GEORGE. Ay, and I'll make sure of mine ! Where is he ?

JACOB. No, I want no help from you. I only want my child back to my home and heart.

GEORGE. Where is he ?

JACOB. You have no right to know while there is murder in your heart.

GEORGE. It's not murder—it's justice. Where is he ?

Enter LYDIA with hat and coat.

JACOB. I will not tell you. Lydia, you'll get her room ready for her. Have everything just as it used to be, and some flowers on the table ; she's fond of flowers. I shall bring her home to-morrow. Yes, my poor wanderer, I shall bring her home to-morrow.

(Exit.)

LYDIA *(following him)*. Good-bye, sir ; give my love to her and tell her she shall be made welcome home again.

(Exit, following JACOB.)

GEORGE *(left alone, looks round)*. Four weeks since she left home—a whole month ; and she is still in his arms. Oh my enemy, I shall find you yet ! Let me but meet him face to face——

(His eye falls on the envelope of LETTY'S letter on floor. He picks it up.)

Her writing ! The Torquay postmark ! That's near enough ! I shall find him !
(*Exit.*)

Scene draws up and discovers Scene II.

SCENE II

DRAWING-ROOM IN FANSHAWE'S VILLA AT TORQUAY.

Doors right and left, window with balcony, showing the sea.

Discover FANSHAWE leaning against conservatory, with cigarette. LEESON down right. Five letters on salver on small table extreme right.

LEESON. I've got everything packed, sir.

FANSHAWE. All right. We leave by the early train. We sail on Friday.

LEESON (*goes*). Yes, sir. Beg pardon, sir, Miss—your lady, I mean—does she go to India with us?

FANSHAWE (*sharply*). Yes, of course.

LEESON. Because this afternoon your lady asked me why I was packing so many trunks for you.

FANSHAWE. Blockhead ! you told her I was ordered to join my regiment in India ?

LEESON. No, sir, I—hem—passed it off, sir.

(*Exit.*)

FANSHAWE. Was ever such cursed luck ! Providence and the War Office must have planned this campaign to spite me ! She shall go to India with

me ; I won't leave her now. (*Sits on sofa.*) To think that I have fallen into my own trap and really grown to love the girl ! For I do love her, and she's good and true too—that is, compared with me. There is something in goodness after all, or why should I feel a half longing to be good when I am with her ? Why should I feel sorry that I have ruined her poor little life ? (*Rises.*) Hang it ! I'm getting maudlin moral. My digestion must be out of order.

(*Goes to fireplace, throws cigarette in fire.*)

How will she take this Indian business ? I must break it to her to-night. The marriage-licence too—that lie's getting threadbare. I shall have to invent a new one, or—I've a good mind to tell her the truth. It's a beastly nuisance to have to keep on telling lies. (*Leaning arms on mantelpiece.*)

Enter LETTY from her room in evening-dress.

LETTY (*eagerly going to letters on table*). Ah ! The post ! The marriage-licence.

FANSHAWE. Not come.

LETTY. Not come ! Not come ! But why do they not send it ? Oh, if you loved me as you say you do, you would not rest one moment till you had put me out of this horrible suspense.

FANSHAWE. Can you not trust me ?

LETTY. Have I not trusted you ? How could I help trusting you ? You gave me no choice.

FANSHAWE. And have I not made you happy?

(Crosses to her.)

LETTY. So happy that I wish I were dead. Oh, it is all like a dream! I am afraid to think—nothing seems real to me; all my life at home, my girlhood when I was good and innocent—oh, it is as far away as if I had lived it in another life, hundreds of years ago! Eustace, Eustace, if you do not mean to make me your wife, in mercy say so, and kill me!

FANSHAWE. Kill you! *(Sits on table.)* Yes, sweet, I think I shall kill you when you tell me that you do not love me.

LETTY. I do not know whether I love or hate you. I only know I fear you, and must obey you.

FANSHAWE. Good girl! Then you'll do as I wish you.

LETTY. What do you mean?

FANSHAWE. I ought to have told you before, but I was afraid of losing you. I am ordered to join my regiment in India. I sail on Friday.

LETTY. But—but what will become of me?

FANSHAWE. I mean to take you with me.

LETTY *(desperately)*. Yes—yes—but as your wife, as your wife.

FANSHAWE. Yes, of course.

(Leaning over her, sitting on table.)

LETTY. You will marry me before we start? Swear it again and again, so that if you break your

word I may kill myself, and lay ten thousand broken oaths against your soul !

FANSHAWE. Letty, you are my wife already.

LETTY. No ! (*Rises.*) I am the poor unhappy fool who believed you when you promised to make her your wife. Oh, what shall I do ! What shall I do ! My father ! My father !

(*Sobbing, sits in front of fireplace.*)

FANSHAWE. Come, dry up your tears. (*Rises, goes up.*) I cannot bear to see you wretched. (*Comes to her.*) Put on your hat and come down to the beach, there's a good girl ! (*Goes to table for hat.*) You'll find me outside. (*Lights cigar.*)

(*Aside.*) I shall have to tell her the truth.

(*Exit at balcony. Clock on shelf strikes half hour.*)

LETTY. Half-past eight ! They are having supper at home. Lydia has just knocked at the study-door, and father has said "Coming, Lydia." I can see him at his bookshelves with his old study-coat, and his dear face with its kind gentle smile. Oh my father ! my father ! (*Rises.*) You were always so good to me, and how have I repaid you ? What can you think of me ? Oh if I could but forget I ever had a home. If I could but get rid of this weight at my heart ! If I could but stop out this one thought ! If I could but sleep and wake again like a little child ! I will forget ! I will forget ! I will forget !

Enter LEESON.

LEESON (*holding open door*). Will you come in?

Enter RADDLES, a dissipated middle-aged man, very shabby, and slightly intoxicated.

I'll find Captain Fanshawe—he was here a few minutes ago. (RADDLES comes down.)

LETTY. What is it, Leeson?

LEESON. A party to see Captain Fanshawe.

LETTY. Your master has gone out on the beach.

LEESON. What name shall I say?

RADDLES. Raddles—Jack Raddles, his old friend Jack.

(LEESON *exit upon balcony after* FANSHAWE.)

Good evening, miss, or ma'am, I suppose I should say. Excuse my intruding, but the Captain and me are very old friends—relatives I should say.

LETTY. Indeed!

RADDLES. Yes, you wouldn't think it now, would you? A gentleman like the Captain, and a seedy sort of a chap like me, but so it is, and was uncommon chummy at one period of our lives—existence, I should say—when the Captain was at Oxford. Yes, I'm Captain Eustace Fanshawe's brother-in-law, I am.

LETTY. His brother-in-law?

RADDLES. Yes; and I don't care who knows it. I ain't ashamed of the Captain, if the Captain's ashamed of me.

LETTY. His brother-in-law ! You married Captain Fanshawe's sister ?

RADDLES. Oh no ! The Captain married my sister.

LETTY (*suddenly, fiercely*). But she's dead ! She's dead ! She's not alive now ?

(*Comes a step towards him.*)

FANSHAWE *enters, and remains by conservatory.*

RADDLES. Oh yes she is, or rather she was when I left her this morning.

(FANSHAWE *comes down in a threatening manner. RADDLES seeing him retreats a step up stage.*)

LETTY (*to FANSHAWE*). You hear this man. He says his sister is your wife. Is it true ?

FANSHAWE (*firmly*). Quite true.

(LETTY, *who has been standing with her arm raised, lets it fall helplessly by her side.*)

LETTY. You villain !

(*Staggers to sofa. FANSHAWE takes a step up stage after RADDLES.*)

FANSHAWE. How dare you show your face in England, and in my house ?

RADDLES. Well, Captain, the fact is, Mabel and me have been hard up—very hard up, and she thought you wouldn't like it to be known as we were in pecuniary distress.

FANSHAWE. You want money? Haven't you had enough, the pair of you, to drink yourselves to death before this? Where are you staying?

RADDLES. At the "Green Man," Union Street, next door to the Temperance Hotel.

FANSHAWE. I'll come to you there in half an hour. Clear out of this, and if you show your face in my house again I'll have you horsewhipped.

(*Opening door. Exit RADDLES quickly. FANSHAWE turns to LETTY.*)

FANSHAWE. Now you know why I cannot marry you. (*Comes down.*)

LETTY. Let me go! Let me go! This is no place for me. Oh God, I have no name, no place upon this earth!

FANSHAWE. You have one name, one place. Come to India with me as my wife.

LETTY. Your wife! I deserve your taunts! Your wife! You do well to mock me with that name now that I have given up all my hopes in earth and heaven to win it from you—now that you have cheated me out of it! Your wife! Have you not humbled me enough? Let me go! You and I are strangers!

FANSHAWE. Where will you go? Home?

LETTY. Home!

FANSHAWE. Where else can you go?

LETTY. You know I cannot go home. My father cannot take me back again,—I have dishonoured him!

FANSHAWE. Nonsense ! Think how pleased they will be to see you back again, and what a fuss they will make over you. Think what a splendid subject you'll make for them to exercise their tongues on first, and their Christian pity afterwards.

LETTY (*maddened*). I hate their pity and their forgiveness ! I will have none of it ! I will kill myself !

FANSHAWE. Kill yourself ! When you can come to India with me !

LETTY. Oh, I will hear no more ! Let me go !

(*Going to door.*)

FANSHAWE. Where will you go ? Listen to me. (*Puts her on sofa.*) I have wronged and deceived you, but I love you. I have robbed you of your good name and wrecked your life, but I love you. I have not given you the name of wife—you know now that I cannot,—but, by God, I love you as much as ever wife was loved. Letty, your life is tied to mine. You have already paid the price. You will not be mad enough to leave me ? What hope, what life have you apart from me ?

LETTY. You can remind me of that now you have destroyed my every other hope in life !

FANSHAWE. Yes, and I would do it again to win you. I love you with a cruel love that will not be denied. You shall not escape me. I will not give you up !

LETTY. Oh, I think I shall go mad ! I think I shall go mad !

FANSHAWE (*comes to her*). Go mad! What for? You'll be happy when you've left England, and I'll soon teach you to care as little what people say about you as I do. Besides, that woman may die, and then I will marry you——

LETTY. Ah, but if she should live——

FANSHAWE. Let her live! And you, Letty, dare to live for me. Dare to be happy. Our world is our two selves. In that we are secure. Choose—— will you go from this house nameless and dishonoured, or will you come to India with me?

LETTY. Ah, you have me in your power, and you know it. Very well, I will do as you bid me. I will dare to be as bad as you wish me. Make me like yourself. (*Throws herself into his arms.*)

FANSHAWE (*clasping her*). Swear you will never leave me!

LETTY. What need to swear that? Where can I go?

FANSHAWE. Nothing but death shall part us!

LETTY. Nothing but death shall part us! And may it soon come to me!

FANSHAWE. I shall soon hear a different tune from those dear lips. We leave by the early train to-morrow.

LETTY. I shall be ready.

FANSHAWE. I'm going to get rid of that man.

(*Leaves her, picks up hat from table, goes to door, holds out his hands. She comes to him.*)

My wife in all but name. (*Kisses her.*) I'm sure of you now. (*Exit at balcony.*)

LETTY. Yes, you are sure of me. You are glad, are you? So am I! Oh, I have passed the boundaries, stepped over the eternal landmarks! Yes, you are sure of me! And I shall grow to be as wicked as you are! Yes, as wicked as you are! Yes, on, on, on, on—wherever you drag me, I will come! I will come! Don't fear! I'll be just what you make me!

Enter LEESON.

LEESON. Ma'am, your father is at the door and wishes to speak to you.

LETTY. My father! No, no, no, Leeson! Shut the door. I will not see him! I am not here—say that I have left—anything to keep him from me! Stay, Leeson, does he look ill, grieved? Is he changed? Does he seem angry?

LEESON. No, ma'am, he spoke very quietly, and said he must see you.

LETTY. I cannot see him, Leeson. I will not! Tell him his daughter is not here—tell him he has no daughter; she died when she forgot she had a father and a home.

JACOB enters.

Ah! (*Starts away.*) (*LEESON exit.*)

JACOB. Letty! My Letty! My poor girl, have I found you!

LETTY. Ah, don't touch me ! Don't speak to me ! Do you know what I am ? Leave me ; I'm not fit you should touch me !

JACOB. Ah, don't say that. Letty dear, don't turn away from me ; it is I, your father, come to take you home again.

LETTY. No—no ! Go away ! I have disgraced you ! I am your daughter no longer ! (*Turns, looks at him.*) And you are so changed. Oh, it was I who struck the blow ! I did it, in return for all your kindness and love for me.

JACOB. Ah, but I forgive you. (*Embraces her.*) There ! (*Putting LETTY'S head on his shoulder.*) Lean your head upon my shoulder. Don't shrink from me.

LETTY. Oh, I cannot bear you should speak like this ! Why don't you hate me for all the misery I have caused you ? Why don't you drive me from you ? Then I could bear it ; but oh, your kindness will drive me mad ! I'm not worth caring for. Go away and forget me. (*Turning away from him.*)

JACOB. Letty ! Letty ! Listen, my dear. I have come to take you from this place and make you a good and happy girl again.

LETTY. I can never be good and happy again. I must be wicked and miserable. Yes, I must. I have chosen my path—I must go on.

JACOB. Oh my child, I dare not guess what your future will be if you will not listen to me ! I will give

you no peace day or night till I have won you back. I will tear you from this man's arms.

LETTY. He loves me. He has sworn to make me his wife, and I have promised to be faithful to him. I am bound to him. Oh father, it is my one chance of winning back my good name! What hope, what future is there for me apart from him?

JACOB. What hope, what future is there for you with him? Letty, my poor child, what possesses you? It cannot be you who are talking like this—the little girl I brought up at my side and watched over day and night. Oh Letty, you are not yourself, you are blind, you are dazed! Ah, but you will listen to me and come home with me—come home!

LETTY. I cannot. I dare not face the people who knew me. You know how bitter your good people are against such as I. Besides, it would mean ruin for you. Oh, I have weighed it all! Don't you see, father, it was that one thought that drove me on—the thought that I had disgraced you and put a stain upon all your life's work! If I come back your people will turn you out from your place—it will take the very bread from your lips.

JACOB. What if it should? Do you think there is anything in the world for me in comparison with winning you back, my dear? Do you think I should ever be happy again if I thought you were lost? But nobody knows of it, dear. I could not bear that people should talk of you—I knew you would soon

come back, and so, dear, nothing is known—your secret is quite safe.

LETTY. How good, how kind of you !

JACOB. Ah, come home, dear ! all shall be forgotten and forgiven. And I shall always be with you, and no one shall say a harsh word, or think a harsh thought of you ! Come !

LETTY. Oh, if I dared ! If I could ! But no ! I'm on the wrong side for turning back. I have given him my promise.

JACOB. Ah, Letty, I too have given a promise. I promised your mother on her deathbed that I would watch over you. See, I kneel to you—you will come. Letty, your mother is waiting for you to say "Yes."

(Kneeling, imploring.)

LETTY *(after a long pause)*. Yes, I will come.

JACOB *(rises, clasps her)*. My child ! My child !

LETTY. Wait for me. I'll be back in a moment.

(Exit into her room.)

JACOB. She'll come—she'll come ! I've won her back.

(Crosses, and sits on sofa.)

Enter FANSHAW from balcony. Comes down.

FANSHAW. Mr. Fletcher !

JACOB. Yes, sir. *(Rises.)* If there is any shame or manhood in you, keep away from me—don't tempt me—I dare not trust myself to speak to you. I should forget my calling. Keep away from me, sir.

FANSHAW. What is your business here ?

JACOB. My business here, sir, is this. A thief has stolen my daughter from me—my business, sir, is to save my child from a scoundrel.

FANSHAWE (*getting towards LETTY'S door*). I don't quarrel with your terms, but I don't mean to give up your daughter. (*Crosses to door.*) She is of age—she is here by her own free will—she has promised to stay with me till I can make her my wife.

JACOB. Your wife! I do not believe your promises of marriage, sir. If you had meant honourably by my daughter, why have you not already made her your wife?

FANSHAWE. Well, if you will know, because I am married already.

JACOB. And you dared to— I have no words. Out of my way—give me my daughter.

FANSHAWE. Excuse me. (*Locks door.*) She shall not leave this house until I have spoken to her.

JACOB. Not a word, sir. You shall not have her! Give me that key.

FANSHAWE. No! she is her own mistress. When she comes to that door she shall choose between us. If she is determined to go with you, so be it. But if I can persuade her to stay I'll fight to death to keep her.

JACOB. You shall not have her! You shall not have her! Give me that key. Help! Help! Help!

Enter GEORGE KINGSMILL by balcony.

George! (*Goes to him.*)

FANSHAWE. Who is this man? Who are you, sir?

GEORGE. Letty Fletcher's betrothed husband. She was to have been my wife, but you came between us. You took her from me. Now pay me the cost.

FANSHAWE. What do you want?

GEORGE. I will kill you, or you shall kill me.

JACOB. George! George!

GEORGE. Mr. Fletcher, this is my business. (*To FANSHAWE.*) I know nothing of your rules of honour, as you call them; make any rules you like, so long as we meet face to face on equal terms.

FANSHAWE. I refuse to fight a madman who forces his way into my house.

GEORGE. What! You were brave enough to steal from me the girl I loved! You were brave enough to ruin and betray her, and you haven't courage enough to answer for it!

FANSHAWE (*about to respond, checks himself*). I will not fight you.

GEORGE. You shall! You rat, if you won't meet me man to man, I'll kill you as I would any other rat. (*Striking him. FANSHAWE drops key.*)

JACOB (*coming between them*). George, are you mad? Her story is not known. I am trying to save

her good name. If you kill him you kill her good name. George, spare him.

LETTY'S VOICE (*at door*). Father, I am ready. Why have you locked the door?

JACOB. For her sake, George, it must not be known—it must be hushed up, for her sake.

GEORGE (*a long pause—then reluctantly*). For her sake, to save her good name.

(JACOB *picks up key from floor where FANSHAWE has dropt it, and unlocks the door.*)

LETTY *enters in dress she wore when she left home.*

JACOB *takes her across towards door.* GEORGE *is up stage.*

FANSHAWE. Letty, your promise! You *shall* go to India with me.

GEORGE. To India?

JACOB (*at door*). My child has said her last word to you, sir. Leave her to me, and let me spend all my life in teaching her to forget the wrong you have done her. Come, my dear. Home! Home!

(FANSHAWE *makes a movement to stay them, but is confronted by GEORGE, who comes down centre of stage.*)

Quick CURTAIN.

(*Five days elapse between Acts III. and IV.*)

ACT IV

SCENE I

IN FRONT OF BETHEL CHAPEL ON SUNDAY MORNING.

The chapel is a plain red-brick building with large doors for chief entrance. A small door at side leading to vestry.

Enter HOGGARD and PRABBLE, meeting in centre.
During this scene people go into chapel.

HOGGARD (*Bible and hymn-book under his arm, evidently in very good spirits*). Good-morning, brother Prabble. Good-morning.

PRABBLE. Good-morning, Mr. Hoggard; you've been away for a few days, haven't you?

HOGGARD. Yes, brother Prabble. (*Looking towards vestry-door.*) Has Fletcher gone in yet?

PRABBLE. I should think not—it wants some time to service. We're early.

HOGGARD. Yes, I'm always early. I haven't been late for public worship once during the last

twenty years. Have you thought any more of what we were talking about? Fletcher, I mean.

PRABBLE. Yes, and I quite agree with you—we want a younger man at Bethel.

HOGGARD. Yes, one with a louder voice, and more business-energy. Religion's no good nowadays, brother Prabble, unless it's combined with business-energy and push. What's the secret of all our great revivalist meetings? Why, business-energy and push and advertising! Why does one chapel prosper while another goes to the wall? Business-energy and push. What's been the secret of my success in life? Why, business-energy and push and advertising! "Push yourself to the front; cut the ground from under your neighbour's feet—get up a big sensation." That's the great secret of success in business, brother Prabble; and the same rule applies to religion.

PRABBLE. To be sure it does.

HOGGARD. Look at me! I began life in a very humble way. My origin wasn't at all distinguished. I went into that tanyard, Prabble, at half a-crown a week, and without shoes to my feet. I think I may take a little honest pride in myself, brother Prabble.

PRABBLE. If you can't, Mr. Hoggard, who can?

HOGGARD. And I don't mean to stop, Prabble, till I'm one of our merchant princes, and an M.P. That's my ambition, Prabble—M.P.

PRABBLE. Well, I'm sure there's plenty of members of Parliament very inferior to you, Mr. Hoggard.

HOGGARD. Just so. I think I shall be rather above the average. (*Takes PRABBLE'S arm confidentially and leads him aside.*) Well, we were talking about religion. What we want at Bethel is a sensation, to rouse the people from their lethargy, and cut the ground from under the Church-people's feet.

PRABBLE. Yes, and we want the Stores denounced, and Mr. Fletcher ain't the man to do it.

HOGGARD (*confidentially*). At the same time we can't turn Fletcher off without sufficient reason. We must find something against him.

PRABBLE. Yes, he's been with us a good many years, and all the poor folk are very fond of him.

HOGGARD. Now supposing I should find a sufficient reason, supposing I should call upon him to resign, will you support me?

PRABBLE (*cordially*). Certainly, certainly, Mr. Hoggard. You're one of my best customers. You support my shop, and I'll support you.

HOGGARD. Very well, Prabble, I'll speak to him this morning, before he goes into the pulpit, and I can rely upon you?

PRABBLE. Oh, I go with you entirely.

HOGGARD. Then we understand one another. How sweet it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil that poured down Aaron's beard! Mrs. Prabble and all the little Prabbles quite well?

PRABBLE. Quite well, thank you. How's Mrs. Hoggard, and all the little Hoggards? (*Both going in.*)

HOGGARD. All in capital health. What glorious weather !

PRABBLE. Yes, so good for trade ! (*They both move towards chapel-door.*)

HOGGARD. Our hearts ought to be filled with thankfulness. After you, brother Prabble, after you ! What does the Bible say ? "He that abaseth himself shall be exalted."

(*Makes way for PRABBLE, who goes into chapel.*)
(*Aside.*) I can twist Prabble round my finger. Now, Mr. Fletcher, if you don't agree to my terms, this is the last Sunday you'll preach at Bethel.

(*GREENACRE has entered, and shuffled up to him, stands bowing and cringing—he is very disreputable.*)

Get out, get out, you old vagabond ; really it's abominable that such persons should be allowed in a Christian place of worship ! What is religion coming to ?
(*Exit into chapel.*)

LOT *enters.* GREENACRE *turns to him.*

GREENACRE. Good - morning, Muster Burden. So Muster Fletcher's come back, and Miss Letty, she's home again too ! La, what a beautiful sermon he preached last Sunday—it did me good, it refreshed me, it did.

LOT. Well, you wanted refreshing, after getting into such a state on the Saturday night.

(UNCLE BAMBERRY *has entered, an old working man, very respectable, dressed in his Sunday's best, very deaf.*)

LOT (*to* UNCLE BAMBERRY). Well, Uncle, how's your deafness?

UNCLE BAMBERRY (*holding ear*). Eh?

LOT (*shouting*). Your infirmity?

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Eh? Oh! she's very well—she's at home, cooking the dinner. (*Crosses GREENACRE, who has been bowing and cringing.*) No, Peter, I've got nothing for you.

GREENACRE. I was saying, what a beautiful sermon we had.

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Too hot for me! Too hot—scorches me up.

GREENACRE. Muster Fletcher's sermon—sermon.

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Sermon—Aye, aye! I can't hear. I haven't heard a sermon this thirty years and more; my infirmity, can't hear—daresay it's all very good—I always come to chapel.

GREENACRE (*sniffing*). Yes, we mustn't neglect our privileges.

UNCLE BAMBERRY. I work in the brickfield all week, and I be knocked up every Saturday night, and I can sleep a deal more comfortable in chapel nor anywhere else—picks me up for the week; and my

missus wants me out of the way, while she does her bit o' cleaning and cooking.

LOT. But you shouldn't snore, it disturbs the congregation.

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Aye, aye, what a blessing Sunday is for us poor people. Whatever should we do without it?

LOT (*shouting*). You mustn't snore in the sermon.

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Swore in the sermon—bless my soul, who did?

LOT. You did (*shouting*). “Snored, snored.”

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Snored, did I? (*very penitently*). Well, I *am* sorry! Bless me, did I snore? You don't say so? Did I snore? Did I now?

LOT. Yes, and we can't have it, especially in the front pews. You'd better take a back seat—back seat, right out of the way (*dropping his voice*)—(*shouting*) right at the back of the gallery, d'ye hear?

UNCLE BAMBERRY. Me go to the back of the gallery? What for? I pay my eighteenpence a quarter pew-rent, and if I be awake I can't hear a blessed word, so what's the harm of my going to sleep?

LOT. But you must go to sleep gently—gently! (*roars.*) Gently! you old fool!

UNCLE BAMBERRY (*obstinately*). I shan't give up my corner. (*Crosses.*) Can't hear a blessed word what the minister says. I daresay it all very good, you know. Bless me, did I snore? dear, dear, dear now. Shan't give up my corner. (*Exit into chapel.*)

GREENACRE. I never sleep in the sermon, I wouldn't miss a word of it for the world; I drink it all in, I do.

LOT. Yes, if there's anything to drink, you wouldn't leave much. There, you be off, here's Mr. Fletcher coming.

GREENACRE. I want to thank him——

LOT. You want to get a dinner out of him. Be off into chapel, and pray as you may soon be took off to a better place, for we've had quite enough of you here.

(Takes him by back of neck, pushes him into chapel.)

JACOB *enters*.

JACOB *(hurriedly)*. Well, Lot, what news? Is my poor child's secret safe?

LOT. It's quite safe, Mr. Fletcher. I've been talking casual-like among the congregation, and they all think Miss Letty's been away visiting in London.

JACOB. And if the truth had leaked out, you think you would have heard it, Lot?

LOT. Of course I should. Don't you worry, sir, it's all passed over, and nobody knows a word about it.

JACOB. Thank you, Lot. I hope I'm not doing wrong in hiding the truth, but I couldn't make known her shame.

LOT. Where is Miss Letty?

JACOB. She's there at home, waiting at that

window, poor child ! She was afraid to be seen until I had come on and got to know whether her secret was safe. I promised her I would wave my handkerchief if all were well. (*Takes out handkerchief, waves it.*) There, you see, she's seen the signal. She'll come.

LOT. Well, I'm glad that it's passed off without any trouble or unpleasantness, sir.

JACOB. God bless you, Lot ! You've been a true friend to me.

LOT. Don't you say anything about that, sir, or else you'll make me feel very uncomfortable. Anything more that I can do, I shall only be too proud and happy. (*Exit into chapel.*)

JACOB (*looking off*). Ah, she's started. Yes, dear, you may come, all's well—all's well.

GEORGE KINGSMILL *enters*.

George !

GEORGE (*shaking hands*). There's nothing known ?

JACOB. I hope not. I think we shall save her. George, you won't be rash enough to carry out your dreadful threat, and make her shame known.

GEORGE. Not if it will harm her. She's all I care for. If she is safe, there is nothing to keep me in England, and the sooner I leave this place and her, the sooner I shall forget. I've settled everything, and I leave to-morrow. I've come to say good-bye to you and to the place where my fathers worshipped.

JACOB. Good-bye is a hard word to say to you, George. You know it was my dearest wish in life to have you for my son, but it was not to be.

GEORGE. Oh sir, when I got your letter that night telling me she had promised to be my wife I wouldn't have changed places with a king. I knew it couldn't be true that she could ever love me.

JACOB. My poor fellow ! .

GEORGE. However, we have saved her good name. How is she? How does she bear it?

JACOB. Her heart is broken, George. Ah, she is coming. Don't you remember how she used to trip along the street, as if her feet were wings. How she is changed !

GEORGE. It would pain her to meet me : you'll wish her good-bye for me ; and tell her—oh Mr. Fletcher, I may put the whole world between her and me, but she'll still be the nearest and dearest in all the world to me ! Good-bye, Mr. Fletcher.

JACOB. Good-bye, George, good-bye. God bless you !

(Exit GEORGE hastily into chapel; JACOB turns to meet LETTY, who enters timid and anxious, ashamed, looking fearfully round.)

LETTY. Father ! You are quite sure they don't know——

JACOB. Not a syllable—it's quite hushed up, nobody knows it.

LETTY. Yes, I know it, and it seems to me the

very stones and trees know it, for nothing here at home seems the same as it used to be. Father tell me—do I (*deeply ashamed*)—do I look changed? There is no difference in my face, is there?

JACOB. No—no, dear, I think not. You look a little pale. What makes you ask?

LETTY. Because (*pauses—ashamed*) I came by some children in the street just now, and I thought they stared at me.

JACOB. No, dear, no; it is only fancy. Look, dear, here are Mrs. Parridge and Fanny coming. You'll stay and speak to them.

LETTY (*shrinking*). No—no, father.

JACOB. Yes, yes, dear. (*Taking her hand.*)

Enter MRS. PARRIDGE and FANNY, a country-woman and her daughter, of the better labouring class.

MRS. PARRIDGE. Good-morning, Mr. Fletcher, good-morning, Miss Letty. You've been away, visiting, haven't you?

LETTY. Yes.

MRS. PARRIDGE. I hope you had a pleasant holiday. Where have you been?

LETTY. I have been—in London.

MRS. PARRIDGE. We've got a bit of news for you, Mr. Fletcher, and for you too, Miss Letty. Come, Fanny, you tell it to Miss Letty.

FANNY (*giggling and blushing*). Mother, don't!

MRS. PARRIDGE. Bless the girl, it's nothing to be ashamed of. You ask her, Miss Letty. I know it'll interest you. Young girls always like to hear about getting married.

(LETTY *winces, recovers herself, and nerves herself to speak to FANNY.*)

LETTY. You are going to be married, Fanny?

FANNY (*curtseying*). Yes, miss—please miss, I'm going to be married to William Higgins.

LETTY. I hope you will be happy, with all my heart.

MRS. PARRIDGE. We wanted to ask you if you'd be kind enough to marry them, Mr. Fletcher?

JACOB. Why yes, to be sure I will, Mrs. Parridge.

MRS. PARRIDGE. And, Miss Letty, you'll come too?

LETTY (*quickly*). Yes, yes, I shall be pleased to come.

MRS. PARRIDGE. That's right. What a blessing it is to have good children like ours, Mr. Fletcher. My Fanny is a good girl; she isn't like that Lucy Gatehouse. (LETTY *winces and turns away.*)

JACOB (*quickly*). It isn't for us to judge, Mrs. Parridge. Who made us to differ? Who made your daughter so much better than her companion? Let Him judge who knows all hearts, and let us be dumb.

MRS. PARRIDGE. I suppose you'll be asking us to *your* wedding one of these days, Miss Letty?

JACOB. No, no, Letty has no thought of marriage.

MRS. PARRIDGE. You don't mean to say that such a sweet pretty flower as our Miss Letty won't be gathered by somebody.

JACOB. Come, it's time for me to go in. Good-morning, Mrs. Parridge. Good-morning, Fanny.

MRS. PARRIDGE. Good-morning, sir; good-morning, Miss Letty.

(FANNY *curtsies*. *Exeunt* MRS. PARRIDGE and FANNY *into chapel*.)

LETTY (*leans on JACOB'S shoulder*). Oh father, my punishment is greater than I can bear! Every word they spoke went to my heart.

JACOB. They meant it all in kindness, dear; and don't you see, it shows they suspected nothing, it shows you are safe.

LETTY. If I could be sure that the past will never be known.

JACOB. The danger is over, dear. All is safe.

(*Crosses*.)

LETTY. I will go through your vestry. Then I shall not meet anybody.

JACOB. Come then, dear. Dry up your tears, and try to look a little more like your old self. Courage, dear—it's only this once. The ordeal will soon be over. Courage, courage!

(*Leads her in at side-door*.)

(*Scene draws up and discovers Scene II.*)

SCENE II

THE VESTRY-ROOM AT THE CHAPEL,

A plain white-washed room; doors leading to chapel, to Jacob's room, and to outside passage. Window at back.

Discover HOGGARD walking up and down with impatient malignant expectation.

HOGGARD. Make haste, Mr. Fletcher! Make haste!
(JACOB and LETTY pass window.)
Oh, here you are at last.

JACOB and LETTY enter.

JACOB. Good-morning, Mr. Hoggard.

HOGGARD. I want a word with you. (*Sternly.*)

JACOB. I have only a few minutes before I go into the pulpit. Will you come after the service?

HOGGARD. No, now. (*Frowning and staring at LETTY.*) You can go, madam, your company isn't wanted.

LETTY (*indignantly*). You forget yourself, sir.

HOGGARD. Oh, none of that, my lady, it won't wash.

JACOB. Step into my room, Letty.

LETTY. Oh father, had I not better stay?

JACOB (*taking her up stage to door*). Hush!

(*Puts her into room at back, closes door after her. Harmonium in chapel plays voluntary all through the scene, until the entrance of the congregation.*)

JACOB. Well, Mr. Hoggard.

HOGGARD (*has seated himself with calm determined malice*). I understand you are sending a man to my place to value my stock and premises for Mrs. Bristow.

JACOB. Yes, I have given him instructions to begin to-morrow.

HOGGARD. You'd better withdraw your instructions.

JACOB. I cannot.

HOGGARD. Oh yes, you can, and you will too. You'll accept Crisp's valuation.

JACOB. You have already had your answer.

(*Turns up stage towards door at back,*
HOGGARD *rises and intercepts him.*)

HOGGARD. Stay, where are you going?

JACOB. To prepare for the pulpit.

HOGGARD. Stop a minute, sir. Before you stand in that pulpit, I want you to give me an exact account of your daughter's conduct for the last month.

JACOB. (*surprised, shaken*). Why, what makes you ask—she has been away from home, visiting.

HOGGARD. Where? With whom?

JACOB. That is my business.

HOGGARD. And mine, as a deacon of this chapel. Come, you'd better accept Crisp's valuation.

JACOB. In mercy's name, what do you suspect?—what do you know?

HOGGARD. You accept our valuation—I suspect nothing; I know nothing. You refuse (*advancing towards chapel-door*)—I forbid you to enter that pulpit till I have told all the congregation the truth about their Minister's daughter, where she has been, what she is.

(*JACOB falls helplessly into chair by side of table.*)

Oh, you'd preach to other people, would you? You'd show us the straight path! Look at home! Preach to your own child! Set your own house in order!

JACOB (*hoarse, calm*). You know, then?

HOGGARD. Everything. I had my suspicions, and last Wednesday, just to satisfy a little curiosity, I got a private detective to hunt up Captain Fanshawe. Oh, you needn't be alarmed. I know he has left England, but he's been lately living at Torquay. I went to Torquay. Were you ever there?

JACOB (*rises, comes to HOGGARD*). Mr. Hoggard, you know my child's secret. Yes, she is guilty. Ah, but you do not know she had no chance of escape. You will not ruin her. You will have mercy upon her. Do as you choose to me, but spare her. Do not publish her shame to the world. Spare my poor child. Think if it were your own daughter.

(*HOGGARD laughs contemptuously, and shakes his head.*)

Think what it means to her and me. I have snatched her from sin and despair. I have won her back to peace and purity and home-love. She is beginning

her life anew. She has repented in the dust. I will answer for her that all her future shall be as white and stainless as a child's. Have mercy! If you make known her guilt, it will perhaps madden her back to sin and destruction. Ah, but you will not refuse mercy to a soul that cries to you in such need. Mercy for my poor wronged daughter! Give her one chance to redeem the past. Mercy—you can save her or destroy her. Her future is in your hands. Mercy, mercy, mercy!

HOGGARD. Well, I don't want to harm the girl, but her future is in your hands, not mine. Come, now, nobody except me knows or shall know anything of this business. I shall hold my tongue. Come, accept Crisp's valuation, and she shall be safe.

JACOB. You will drive me to that? Either I must stand by and let you rob the widow and orphans of my dead friend, or you will blast my child's name. That is what you offer me?

HOGGARD. Yes, if you like to put it in that way; and remember, if this business comes to light, we shall be obliged to call upon you to resign your ministry, and I don't think you'll find it very easy to get another if I have anything to do with the references. Come, now, which is it to be?

JACOB. Oh, it is devilish to put me to such a trial! Man, you have children of your own. How dare you tempt me? It is beyond my strength. What can I do? What can I do?

HOGGARD. Come, the time's short. I've made up my mind. You know me. You accept our valuation? Yes or no?

JACOB (*after a pause, very determinedly*). No. I will not pay the price you ask. You shall not defraud your dead partner's wife. I refuse your offer, Mr. Hoggard.

(*The door at back opens, LETTY enters, very pale. JACOB rushes to her and takes her in his arms.*)

Letty, my girl! Oh, how can I tell you?

LETTY (*calm, despairing*). There is no need to tell me. I have heard all.

JACOB. Oh, forgive me, my darling! I am sorely pressed, and I don't know which way to turn. Tell me, my child, what am I to do?

LETTY. Father, you shan't put yourself in this man's power for my sake. Besides, what would be the good?—he knows it to-day, and all the world may know it to-morrow. Oh, I would rather be at the mercy of all the world than at his! Oh, I felt sure it would come! I knew we couldn't hide it. Never mind—I can bear it! I will!

JACOB. My brave girl! (LETTY *crosses to JACOB, who embraces her.*) Yes, you are right; now I feel strong again. (*To HOGGARD.*) You hear what my child says, sir. We will have no dealings with you. Do your worst, we are ready; we ask for no mercy, we stand upon the truth.

HOGGARD (*going to door*). Very well. Your

congregation is there : then I am to make a full statement to them of your daughter's conduct ; I am to ask them whether they think such a character is fit to mix with our wives and daughters, and whether the father who brought up such a child is fit to rule a Christian congregation ? I am to open this door and ask them that ?

JACOB (*springing forward*). No, stand aside, sir. I will ask them myself. (*Thrusts HOGGARD aside, flings open the folding-doors, calls out aloud.*) My friends ! my friends ! I have something to say to you ! Come and hear me all of you ! All of you come and hear !

(*Harmonium ceases, and congregation crowd up to folding-doors. Amongst them GEORGE KINGSMILL, PRABBLE, MRS. PARRIDGE, FANNY, LOT, UNCLE BAMBERRY, and GREENACRE.*)

All of you ! This way ! Do you hear ? I have something to say to you !

I have worked amongst you for more than twenty years. I have stood up in that place and taught you for half my life, and I thought to end my days in your service. But the time has come when I can guide you no longer. Providence has laid a heavy trial upon me. I cannot bear to preach to you again, my friends, because—because——

(*Turns to LETTY and shelters her in his arms.*)

Oh my dear child, how can I say it ?

LETTY. Go on ! go on ! I can bear it !

JACOB. —because—you know my child has been away from home. A villain trapped her into his power; she was at his mercy in a great city. My friends, my own child is such a one—yes, such a one as that woman who was sent away to sin no more. And knowing how bitterly and truly she has repented, I would have hidden her shame—yes, you will not think any the worse of me for trying to hide it—but it has come to light—it is known in your midst—and now I dare not stand up in that place as an example any more. My friends, my teaching among you is at an end.

(Turns to LETTY, who is sobbing on his shoulder.

Congregation talk among themselves.)

HOGGARD *(comes down)*. Then we understand you resign your ministry, Mr. Fletcher?

JACOB. You understand aright, sir.

HOGGARD. Under the circumstances, I don't see what else you could do, so on behalf of the members generally we accept your resignation.

GEORGE *(stepping forward from crowd)*. Wait a bit. You are going to turn Mr. Fletcher from his pulpit?

HOGGARD. Well, we have got to think of public opinion. The Church-people look down upon us. They treat us like dirt as it is, and what would they say if it was known that we kept on a minister who had such a daughter as that girl there?

GEORGE. Silence! Mr. Fletcher and all of you,

my family is well known in this neighbourhood. We have lived here for seven generations, and no soul living can breathe a word against us. I am leaving England to-morrow morning for ever. Before I start, Mr. Fletcher, I am willing to marry your daughter, and I pledge you my word to leave her in your care. I offer to give her the protection of my name, and if any man dares to speak a word against her who is to bear that name, let him say it in my hearing, and I will answer him.

LETTY (*to JACOB*). No, no, father! Tell him it cannot be. I have done him too much wrong already. (*Aside.*) And this is the man whose love I threw away!

JACOB (*to GEORGE*). No, George, we cannot accept your sacrifice, and it would not avail. The past would still remain. Disgrace would still hang about us. My friends, I cannot speak to you any more this morning. Mr. Hoggard, we will give up the minister's house as soon as it is wanted for a new tenant.

LETTY. Oh father, what will become of us?

JACOB. Come, Letty, we will go home. The ravens are cared for, and we shall not be forgotten. Come!

LETTY. No, father, I am not fit to go with you! Throw me off. Then they cannot take your place from you. (*Goes away from him.*) Disown me!

JACOB. Nay, my Master never disowned such as

you. Disown you! Nay, I own you as my dear daughter—my dear child! Be brave, dear! we have faced the truth. Now we have no need to hide the past. No, from this hour we will begin to live it down.

CURTAIN

(Four years elapse between Acts IV. and V.)

ACT V

SCENE—JACOB'S COTTAGE ON THE OUTSKIRTS
OF STEEPLEFORD

A very poverty-stricken room, but clean and tidy. Door and window at back opening into lane—through the window a wintry sunset fades into twilight. Door left leading into kitchen. Door right leading to staircase. Cupboard right. Old sofa, broken-down chairs. Fireplace down stage left, and looking-glass over it.

LOT enters at back as LYDIA comes from staircase.

LYDIA. Oh, it's you, Lot!

LOT. How's Miss Letty to-day?

LYDIA. She's just fallen asleep. She seems quite bright and lively this afternoon, but I'm afraid to trust it, Lot—it's deceitful.

LOT. Miss Letty overtaxed her strength nursing all them people when the fever was about.

LYDIA. To be sure she did. Flesh and blood ain't cast-iron, and there she was in them courts and alleys, week after week, night and day, with scarcely any rest.

LOT. Yes, and amongst the very worst characters of the town.

LYDIA. Doctor Marsden told me that her nursing saved more lives than his medicine, and I said, "Very likely, doctor,—I've got a very poor idea of physic in general," I said, "and I daresay yours ain't no better than the rest." And I said, "I'm not particular what I turn my hand to, but as for nursing beggars and thieves and chimney-sweeps, why," I said, "I'd rather the Lord in His mercy took 'em all to Himself right straight away."

LOT. Ah, if ever there was an angel on earth it's been our Miss Letty this last four years.

LYDIA. Yes. I don't wish that Captain Fanshawe any harm now he's dead, but I'm very glad I haven't to answer for his wickedness, that's all!

LOT. It seemed like a judgment on him, his getting killed over in India almost as soon as he set his foot there. Where's Mr. Fletcher?

LYDIA. He's gone to see about a Sunday's preaching at Little Swancot.

LOT. I suppose things are no better with him?

LYDIA. No, he's had the offer of several ministries, but when Hoggard wrote to 'em about Miss Letty of course they wouldn't have him.

LOT. Well, it's a comfort Hoggard won't be able to do him any more harm.

LYDIA. Have they caught Hoggard yet?

LOT. No, but there's a reward offered for him. He'd better take care. Tom Marks and a lot of the subscribers to the Penny Bank are after him, and they swear they'll lynch him.

LYDIA. I hope they will. Fancy Hoggard being wanted by the police!

LOT. Hoggard was too grasping. If he'd been satisfied he might have been a rich man to-day, but he took to speculating, and the more money he lost the more he kept throwing after it, till he got quite out of his depth.

LYDIA. Quite into his depth you mean. The gaol will be just the right place for him. The rascal, to rob poor people of their little savings as they put by for their old age!

LOT. Why, he was bankrupt when he started this Penny Bank. I can prove that!

LYDIA. You can? Then you do! You go and give all the evidence you can against him, and if you don't get him fourteen years, I shall never respect you again.

LOT. Yes, Miss Lydia, I will—I'd do anything to please you. *(Ogling her.)*

LYDIA. There, that's enough, Mr. Burden. Here's the minister!

Enter JACOB at back, very much aged and broken-down.

JACOB (*eagerly*). Well Lydia, how is she? (*Going to staircase-door, opening it gently.*)

LYDIA. She seems rather better.

JACOB. What did I tell you? I'm sure she'll get better—my dear brave girl!

LYDIA. She's just fallen asleep.

JACOB. I won't disturb her! (*Closes door softly, stays at door and listens.*) Ah, Lot, my lad, how are you?

LOT. Pretty moderate, sir. How's yourself?

(*Shaking hands.*)

JACOB. My heart fails me sometimes, Lot. I'm going down the hill fast. I can't get a ministry, so I get a Sunday's preaching in the villages. They don't give me much, and sometimes there's twelve miles to walk for it; but it keeps the wolf from the door, and he's been very near us lately, Lot. (*Opens the staircase-door again gently, listens anxiously.*)

LYDIA. The vicar called again this afternoon to inquire after Miss Letty.

JACOB. The vicar—what did he say?

LYDIA. He hoped Miss Letty would soon be better, for she was a great help to him amongst the poor. I don't believe the vicar's half a bad sort—though he is Church.

JACOB. I must step up and have a peep at her—she'll soon be better now—yes, she'll soon be better.

(*Exit at staircase-door.*)

LYDIA. He tries to persuade himself that she's

getting well, and I haven't the heart to tell him the truth. He's got enough to bear without that.

LOT. It's a hard struggle for him, and for you, too, Miss Lydia.

LYDIA. Nobody knows how hard, Lot. (*Opens the cupboard.*) There's the cupboard—you see there's half a loaf in it, and when that's gone, I don't know where the next mouthful is to come from.

LOT. But I do—it's coming out of this purse. (*Pulling out his purse.*) Oh Miss Lydia (*sighing*), I've thought of such a beautiful plan!

LYDIA. No don't—Mr. Burden—don't! I know what's coming when you look like that.

LOT. Oh Miss Lydia, I know I'm not very handsome——

LYDIA. No you ain't, Mr. Burden, and that's gospel-truth. Don't look like that, there's a dear good man!

LOT (*correcting his sheep's-eyes*). I won't if you don't like it.

LYDIA. That's better. But it's no use talking about marrying—I've told you dozens of times I won't have you.

LOT. Why not, Miss Lydia? I'd love and cherish you, and I'd always obey you, and I'd bring you home my wages every Saturday night—and I'm a very steady man—and you know, Lydia, you're getting on—you'd better make haste and snap me up.

LYDIA. I'm much obliged, Mr. Burden, but I can't leave my poor old master and Miss Letty.

LOT. Why should you leave them? I'm going to have three pounds a week in my new situation, and you know, you're such a good manager, Lydia, why shouldn't we all have a home together—only, you know, you'd better be Mrs. Burden for the sake of propriety.

LYDIA. Do you mean it? If I marry you, you'll give a home to the minister and Miss Letty.

LOT. Yes, that I will.

LYDIA. You're a downright good little man, Lot, and I've a good mind——

LOT (*eagerly*). Don't spoil a good mind. Say you'll put up with me.

LYDIA (*looking him up and down*). Well, there, perhaps I might do worse.

LOT. Oh Miss Lydia! (*Clasping her loutishly*.) I suppose I may take a kiss, Miss Lydia?

LYDIA (*submitting to be kissed*). Well, just a little one, then. (*LOT kisses her very gravely and reverentially.*)

LOT (*very gratefully*). Thank you, Miss Lydia—I'm so much obliged to you.

LYDIA. There—that's enough of that nonsense. Now there's nothing in the house for the minister's supper.

LOT. Then let's go and buy something.

LYDIA. Come along, then. (*Putting on bonnet and shawl.*) The thousands of times as I've said I never would get married, and now I've been and let myself be persuaded into it!

LOT. Yes, there's lots of women say they never will, but they're generally persuaded into it at last. Just another little one, Lydia—eh? (*Kisses her.*)

LYDIA. What fools women are!

(*Exeunt door in flat. After a pause, enter JACOB from staircase door, he stands at door a moment, and then looking off.*)

JACOB. So pale and beautiful! So peaceful in her sleep! It's not like earthly beauty—it's an angel's face. But she's young. The young are not meant to die. It's the ripe corn that comes to the sickle, not the green shoots. I must set to work on my sermon. (*Begins to write, throws down pen in despair.*) I can't write! They complain that my sermons are too mournful. Well, how can I preach joyful sermons when I've scarcely had anything to eat for two or three days, and have walked six miles in the rain? Oh, I'm tired of it! Why should I struggle any longer? I'm down, I'm beaten! The world is too much for me! I can bear up no longer! (*Breaks down, sobs for some moments, then with a great effort raises himself.*) Come! come! come, Jacob Fletcher, what's the matter now? What's all this murmuring about? (*Goes to looking-glass on wall, stands in front of it, and harangues himself.*) What's the meaning of it, Jacob Fletcher, eh? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Why, you poor miserable old coward, have you gone through so much trouble, and are you going to give way at last? Thank God

that you have saved your daughter, and that she's lived down all disgrace and evil-speaking! Let's have no more of this whimpering! Work! work! work! Oh, you're hungry are you? (*Goes to cupboard and takes out half-loaf on plate.*) Half a loaf! Well, half a loaf is better than no bread. Now what says the old proverb, "Good meat requires good drink!" Well, a cup of clear cold water from the well outside. Why, there! That's right, Jacob Fletcher! That's more like yourself. Now, you're a man again.

(*Exit with candle, very cheerful, left door.*)

A pause. HOGGARD *enters hastily as if pursued. He is gaunt, ragged, starving; he looks round terrified, listens.*

HOGGARD. Have I thrown them off? (*Goes to window.*) Hark! there's somebody coming! (*Goes to door.*) No, it's only the wind. (*Comes down.*) Where am I? Who lives here? I can't hold out any longer! I must have something to eat or I shall die. (*Sees bread on table.*) Ah, bread! (*Seizes it, is about to eat when JACOB re-enters left, with candle.*) Ah! (*Drops the bread.*)

JACOB (*surprised*). Mr. Hoggard!

HOGGARD (*dropping on his knees before JACOB*). Yes, Mr. Fletcher! They're hunting me! They're just outside! Don't give me up to them, Mr. Fletcher! I know I deserve it, but have mercy on me—mercy! Let me stay here a few minutes till they're passed!

Don't turn me out! (*Clutches JACOB'S knees, falls helplessly against them.*) Oh!

JACOB. Pray get up, Mr. Hoggard. I will shelter you as far as I can.

HOGGARD. Thank you! thank you! (*Sits in chair.*) Oh Mr. Fletcher, you don't know what I've suffered! I've been sleeping in hovels and under hedges, and for a week I've had nothing in my lips but what the beasts eat! I'm starving—I'm dying with hunger! (*Rises.*)

JACOB (*pushing the bread towards him*). You're welcome to what I have. Eat!

(*HOGGARD seizes the bread with wolfish hunger, when sound of men shouting is heard outside—men coming towards door.*)

1ST MAN (*outside*). Perhaps he's in here.

2ND MAN (*outside*). Let's see! Let's see!

OMNES. Ay, ay! Come in! (*Etc. etc. murmurs.*)

HOGGARD (*dropping loaf*). They're after me! Hide me somewhere! For mercy's sake, hide me! They'll kill me, they'll tear me to pieces! Hide me! Hide me! Hide me!

(*Clutching JACOB in deadly terror as knocking at door interrupts him. JACOB runs and bolts door, returns to left door.*)

JACOB. This way. (*Opens door.*) Straight through there, and you can get out at the back. I'll keep them here until you are safe away.

(*Knocking at door louder, men murmuring and shouting. Exit HOGGARD.*)

MARKS (*outside*). Open the door! Open the door, or we'll break it open!

JACOB (*opens the door in flat*). What do you want?

(*MARKS and one or two rough men enter cottage, others are seen outside.*)

MARKS. We're after that rascal Hoggard. He's robbed the Penny Bank with our savings. Why, it's Mr. Fletcher, ain't it?

JACOB. Yes, Tom Marks. You remember me.

MARKS. Yes sir, and Miss Fletcher too, God bless her! She nursed my poor little Polly all through the fever.

JACOB. My daughter is lying very ill upstairs. She has just fallen asleep. You will not disturb her.

MARKS. Not for the world, bless her sweet face. (*Murmurs.*) Hold your row, mates, hold your row.

JACOB. Come, persuade your friends to go away quietly. I ask you for her sake to go away quietly! I beg you!

MARKS. All right, sir; so we will. Mates, you know Miss Fletcher the nurse. (*Murmurs of "Yes, yes; Miss Fletcher, yes, we all know her. God bless her!" etc.*) Well, she's very ill, so keep quiet, d'ye hear, and move off. Will you give her our humble respects, sir, and we hope she'll soon be better? Go on, mates. Quiet now! (*Exeunt MARKS and men.*)

(JACOB watches them off, and goes to side door, opens it, calls, takes the candle and looks in.)

JACOB. Mr. Hoggard! (*Pause.*) Mr. Hoggard!
He's gone. He's safe. (*Comes back.*)

PETER GREENACRE *shambles in at back, rather more aged and disreputable than in earlier Acts.*

JACOB. Well, Peter, what is it?

GREENACRE. Jim Bowler's in a dreadful state, Muster Fletcher. Jim's been seeing rats and snakes again, and using sich language as we trembled in our shoes to listen to him. What a terrible thing drink is, Muster Fletcher!

JACOB. Well, you ought to know, Peter.

GREENACRE. Yes, I'm a brand plucked from the burning, I am. I'm a vessel of mercy, but I'm afeared Jim's nothing but a vessel of wrath. If you could come round and talk to him, he'd soon sign the pledge again.

JACOB. What's the good of his signing the pledge?

GREENACRE. Oh, Jim's allays sober for a week or ten days after he's signed the pledge. I will say that for Jim.

JACOB. I'll come and see him to-morrow morning. Good-night, Peter.

GREENACRE. Good-night, Muster Fletcher. La, Muster Fletcher, I can't abide that minister as

they've got at Bethel now; he don't refresh my soul a bit. I feel I've got a aching void, Muster Fletcher, as he don't fill, and I'm afraid I shall have to leave Bethel and go to the Church. Church-folks ain't stingy; there's allays plenty of coal and blankets and pea-soup for them as goes regular to Church and attends to their souls' salvation. I shall have to go to Church, I shall.

Enter PRABBLE. PETER cringes and bows to PRABBLE, who takes no notice of him.

Ah, you're proud and mighty now, Muster Prabble! You're puffed up amongst the princes and rulers of the earth with your new plate-glass shop-front! But p'raps hereafter it'll be *me* as'll be exalted, and you'll be brought low. But I won't despise you! No, I'll forgive you! (*Exit at back.*)

JACOB. Mr. Prabble!

PRABBLE. I daresay you're rather surprised to see me, Mr. Fletcher.

JACOB. You are welcome to our home, such 'as it is. Sit down.

PRABBLE (*sitting*). Thank you. Of course you've heard of the disgraceful goings-on of that scoundrel Hoggard? Shocking, ain't it? And a member of a Christian congregation too!

JACOB. I'm afraid that doesn't change a man's heart, Mr. Prabble.

PRABBLE. No, no, it don't. Well, I mustn't stay.

You know we haven't been very comfortable at Bethel lately.

JACOB. No? How's that?

PRABBLE. Well, the fact is our minister's views on predestination are wrong—altogether wrong, and so he's got a call to a better place—twenty pounds a year more ; and we've had a meeting to-night, and it's been unanimously resolved to ask you to come back to be our minister.

JACOB (*overjoyed*). To come back, did you say? You want me to come back to my old ministry, my old home?

PRABBLE. Then you'll accept it?

JACOB. Accept it! To be sure I will! Tell my people that though I am not so young as I was, I'm not past work! Come back to them—come back! It is what my heart longs for!

PRABBLE. We can make the salary eighty pounds a year. We've prospered exceedingly since the Wesleyans shut up.

JACOB. I don't mind about the money, but—but—my child, my child, Mr. Prabble—how will she be received by the congregation? I couldn't come back if she were to be slighted and scorned—no!

PRABBLE. You needn't trouble about that. We've talked the matter over, and we think, as Captain Fanshawe is dead and as Miss Fletcher has done all she could to make up for the past, we don't see that anybody has any cause to remember that. And you

may tell Miss Fletcher we invite her to come back with you.

JACOB (*dumb with joy, then recovering himself*). God bless you! God bless you! I will tell her—poor girl—it will make her so happy!

(*Shaking hands warmly.*)

PRABBLE. How is Miss Fletcher?

JACOB. She's much better this evening. It's the winter; when the warm weather comes she'll soon be well—she'll soon be well.

PRABBLE (*rising*). Well, then, we shall expect you back amongst us on Sunday week—and—and (*hesitating*)—and I was about to say that—perhaps some of these days you might take up the question of the Stores—it's iniquitous, and it's getting worse and worse. I don't press it, you know—but think it over. Good-night, Mr. Fletcher—good-night.

JACOB. Good-night, Mr. Prabble. Give my best thanks to my congregation—my best thanks!

(*Exit PRABBLE.*)

They ask her to come back amongst them! They ask my strayed sheep to come back to the fold! Hark! what's that? (*Goes quickly to staircase-door, opens it, LETTY, hectic, enters with hair down, and cloak thrown over night-dress.*) Letty! Why, dear, you've left your room! How's this?

LETTY. I feel so much better—so strange and happy; I don't feel a bit tired! (*Staggering, JACOB helps her to sofa.*) I've been asleep, and I dreamed

I was at home again in the old days, and George Kingsmill came, and I teased him as I used to do, but only for a little while—for I had grown to see how good and manly he was; and oh father, I felt how cruel and wicked I had been to him! And look, there is the keepsake he sent me on my birthday ten years ago, when I was only fifteen! Oh, was he not good and true!

(Kissing keepsake, dashing away a tear.)

JACOB. Yes, dear. *(Watching her anxiously—aside.)* She's better! She's quite like herself!

LETTY. I wonder where he is. I wonder how it is he has not written. I should like to see him once to ask him to forgive me for all the wrong I did him.

JACOB. Well, dear, perhaps you may some day. And you're sure—you're sure you're better?

LETTY. Yes, dear daddy—it's quite a miraculous cure. I feel so healthy that I could dance and sing; and to-morrow I shall astonish you—I shall come down and help Lydia with the house-work, and make you so comfortable,—yes, to-morrow; and next week I shall begin my nursing again.

(With great feverish excitement.)

JACOB. My own! And do you think you are well enough to hear a bit of good news?

LETTY. Yes. What is it? I can bear it. I tell you I am quite—quite well! *(Coughing.)* I am not going to be an invalid any more. Tell me, daddy, what is it?

JACOB. Well, dear, they have asked me to come back to my old ministry and to our old home.

LETTY. Have they? I am so glad! And you will go of course, dear; and it won't matter for me, because I can easily get a place as nurse, as soon—as soon as I am well. (*Coughing.*)

JACOB. Do you think I have kept you by me all these years, and that I would part from you now? No, Letty, my people have not asked me to come back alone; they have asked me to bring my daughter with me to take her place as a good woman amongst good women.

LETTY (*with great triumph*). They have done that? Oh father, have I conquered them? Can they forgive me? Have I lived down the past?

(*The outburst of joy is too much for her, she falls fainting in JACOB'S arms.*)

JACOB. Letty, what's this? Letty dear, speak to me! Letty, speak!

LETTY (*very faintly*). I—I'm so weak,—there's no strength in me. I shall never be well again—never—never—never!

JACOB. Oh my darling, don't say that——

LETTY (*starts up, hysterically*). They have forgiven me—forgiven—father—I—I——

(*Falls back, coughing and fainting.*)

JACOB. My dear one, you are very ill— No one here—I must get help!

LETTY. I—oh—— (*Coughs violently, faints.*)

JACOB. Letty—oh, she's dying! She's dying! Lydia! Help! Help! Lydia! She's dying! Ah, no, no—spare her—do not rob me of her these last few years— Her life! Her life! Letty, look up, my dear— Letty! Help! Help! Will no one come?

Knock at door. JACOB goes to it, opens it quickly.

GEORGE KINGSMILL *enters, rough-bearded, bronzed, and roughly-dressed, giving an impression of having been some years in the Colonies.*

GEORGE. Mr. Fletcher!

JACOB. George! (*Shakes hands.*) Look! She's dying! Stay by her side a moment, while I go for Doctor Marsden. (*Exit.*)

GEORGE (*goes to LETTY, bends over her*). Letty! Letty! I've come all across the world only to see your face! Letty—one word! My own—I've loved you through all—I shall love you to the end! I want to take you back to my home to be my wife! Oh, she doesn't hear me! Letty, I'm rich! I've been working all these years for you! You're free! The past is dead and buried! You shall not die! Oh God, it's cruel to kill her now! Is she not mine? Have I not won her by all my long years of toil and agony of love? Letty! Look up! Speak to me!

LETTY (*looking up, very faintly, shows great surprise and weakness*). Ah! You! George! I knew you would come, but— (*Looks round.*) Where are

we? Have I died? and have you come to me after death?

GEORGE. No, on this side death! Letty, I want you to live—I must have you live! All these years I've been working and waiting for this moment! I've dwelt upon it, and lived upon it—out there, all through the long cold nights, I've had but one hope, that you would grow to love me, and come to share my home. Letty, it's waiting for you there, your home. Oh, don't send me back alone! Tell me you will come with me—Letty, do you hear me—do you know me?

LETTY. Yes, I know you now, George. I have so much to tell you. Look, here is the keepsake you gave me on my birthday, years ago——

GEORGE. And here is the necklace you sent me when—when you promised——

LETTY. When I promised to be your wife. Ah, it is all so long ago—you must not grieve—I thought, an hour ago, I was going to be strong and well again—but now I know—this is the end——

GEORGE. Oh, live a little while—a few months—a few days! Live just long enough to let me grow sure that you love me—live to tell me so!

LETTY. You know I love you—with all my heart. (*He clasps her.*) Oh, you are so strong with life, and I am so faint and weak!

GEORGE. God, what use is my strength to me? Give it to her! Oh, my own, my dearest, if I

could but feed you with my life—if I could make you strong again !

LETTY (*quietly*). It's better as it is. I don't mind dying. George, where are you? Can you forgive me?

GEORGE. Forgive you? Oh Letty, I loved you so that I never thought of that !

LETTY (*takes his hand, kisses it*). And I was so blind and thoughtless—I did not know you then. Ah, but I know you now ! Don't leave me ! Where is father? George, you'll take care of him when I'm gone, won't you?

JACOB *enters, comes up behind sofa.*

You mustn't let him fret, and you must talk to him about me—when I'm gone he'll love to talk about me. Yes, he'll lose his daughter, but you will be a son to him, won't you?

JACOB (*coming forward*). Letty—oh must it be—must it be?

LETTY. Where are you, father? Give me your hand. George, give me yours. There, now, I'm quite happy. (JACOB *bursts into tears*.) Hush ! you mustn't cry. Oh, I should like to live a little while for your sakes, but for myself I don't mind at all. When I was a little girl I used to be so frightened of death—now it seems so easy—and quite pleasant. This doesn't seem like death—I only feel a little tired—I want to go to sleep—I—I—I——

(*Drops back fainting.*)

JACOB. Letty, stay with me—stay with me just a little while, till I can come this journey with you. It's only for a little while—it isn't worth saying "good-bye."

LETTY. Good-bye for a little while, then. How dark it's getting! Father—he'll take my place when I'm gone—— (*Breaks off suddenly, looks round wildly, jumps up violently with a shriek.*)—Yes! I have sinned, but can you never forgive me? I have tried so hard to live it down— Oh you Christians, will you never learn to forgive?

(*Wildly staring.*)

JACOB. Letty, Letty—my dear, you have lived it down—no soul dare speak a word against you.

LETTY (*quieting, stares round for some seconds, smiles*). Eh? What is it? Is that you, father? Yes, I have lived it down, haven't I? They forgive me! (*Drops back, looks up smiling.*) I'm so tired, daddy—so tired—— (*Dies.*)

CURTAIN.

APPENDIX

RELIGION AND THE STAGE

(Reprinted from *The Nineteenth Century* review for January 1885 by the kind permission of Mr. James Knowles.)

Je sais bien que, pour réponse, ces messieurs tâchent d'insinuer que ce n'est point au théâtre à parler de ces matières ; mais je leur demande, avec leur permission, sur quoi ils fondent cette belle maxime.—MOLIÈRE, Preface to the *Tartuffe*.

A RECENT production at a London theatre has obtained a greater success perhaps than it merits, because it has incidentally raised the question of how far it is lawful or expedient for a modern playwright to touch religious questions and to put modern English religious life upon the stage.

Upon any question of dramatic craftsmanship, literary skill, or originality of plot, a playwright will do well to abide by the wholesome rule that forbids an artist to speak of his own work or to question any verdict that may be passed upon it. It is true that this rule at times presses somewhat severely upon a dramatic author, inasmuch as, while all other artists are judged by their own performances, a playwright is judged partly by the performances of others, and is praised or blamed not merely

for what he has done or misdono for himself, but for what the management, the actors, the scene-painters, and the carpenters have done or misdono for him. Thus Shakespeare himself would hardly escape severe condemnation as a sorry bungler in stagecraft, were he an unknown playwright and his masterpieces had now to be submitted to the public for the first time at an afternoon performance with stock-scenery and slovenly stage-management.

The curiously divergent values and meanings that a public representation may attach to a play or to certain portions of a play from what the author attaches to them, or that different audiences may attach to the same play, or that the same spectator may attach to the same play seen under fresh conditions and with new actors, these are among the hundred risks inseparable from the playwright's calling. And it is useless—especially would it ill become one who has been unusually fortunate in the interpretation and discussion of his work—to cavil at those conditions and limitations of his art which are at present unavoidable and irremediable. All success or failure that may be due to adequate and skilful, or inadequate and unskilful, production and interpretation, all curious variances of critical and public judgment upon technical questions, are best met with the discreet silence of a quiet smile, and may be allowed to pass on without comment to play their momentary little part in the stupendous comedy of human affairs, thence to be dismissed into forgetfulness. And when one remembers how little difference there is between what the public acclaims as a good play and condemns as a bad one—that is, how little difference there is between the two classes in the higher qualities of literature and character-painting and in illumination of the human heart—when one considers how comparatively little harm would be done to English literature and art if every acting-play

since Sheridan and Goldsmith were irrecoverably lost to-morrow, one may well hesitate to vex the public ear with the discussion of any matter appertaining to modern dramatic work.

But when a playwright is challenged by a part of a first-night audience as to his right to depict any section of the community, or rather as to his right to depict them truthfully and make them use the language that is natural to them; when he is counselled and counter-counselled upon the expediency of altering what is distinctive and what he conceives to be faithful and life-like in his portraiture—in such a case he may perhaps be permitted a word of apology and explanation upon the ground that, small and unimportant as the individual case may be, and not in itself worth a moment's consideration, yet, seeing that the meanest matters may contain the widest issues, the entire question of the future development of the English drama and its right to press on and possess itself of the whole of human life, is more or less raised when any veto is placed, or sought to be placed, upon the dramatist's perfect freedom of choice of subject, persons, place, and mode of treatment. The only restriction that should be placed upon him is that he shall not offend against the recognised code of social decency, and here we have a sufficient safeguard in the censorship and the "common sense of most."

The question has an aspect of expediency that it may be well to deal with first. Obviously, as a matter of expediency and worldly prudence, a dramatist will do wisely to avoid giving offence to the prejudices and susceptibilities of any great portion of his possible audiences. Indeed, so perfectly has this rule been understood upon the recent English stage, so eager have we been to exclude everything that might be offensive or tedious or incomprehensible to any possible spectator, that by a process of continual exhaustion and humble

deference to everybody's prejudices we have banished from the stage all treatment of grave subjects but what is commonplace and cursory and conventional. The course of the drama has been diverted and hopelessly cut off from the main current of modern intellectual life. While the companion arts—painting, poetry, and music—are allowed to present every aspect of human life, on the stage only the narrow, ordinary, convenient, respectable, superficial contemplation and presentation of human affairs is allowed. Though off the stage the gravest matters have been in heated hourly prominence, on the stage nothing of much greater importance has been bruited than how a tradesman's family may prepare itself for alliance with the aristocracy. And such tradesmen! And such aristocrats!

Nothing could better show the impotence and poverty of the modern English drama than the account it has rendered of modern English business-life; nothing could better show how strangely far we are from sincerity and faithful insight in character-drawing, how fond the public is of what is superficial and conventional, than the type of business-man that has been most popular on the stage in recent years. It will be allowed that if Englishmen have been in earnest about anything the last fifty years, they have been in earnest about money-making and commerce. Of gods and saints, and heroes and martyrs, and kings, modern English life has not been quite so prolific as an eager playwright might wish, and in their rarity or absence from his daily sphere he may be forgiven if he fails when he tries his unaccustomed hand upon their portraiture. But—Heaven and Free Trade be praised!—there has been no dearth of business-men in England this generation. No playwright can excuse himself on the plea of want of models to study and paint from. Surely, if sincerity and truth may be reasonably demanded from the drama in any one particular, it is in

the handling of modern business-life. Yet upon turning to the stage what do we find? Of course there is no lack of business-men in our modern plays; rather, of one certain type of business-man, hereafter to be examined, there is an inordinate profusion. Indeed, this particular individual, under various aliases and constantly changing his trade, may be said in one sense to have been the great prop and mainstay of English comedy for some twenty years past. But so far as one can readily remember, the only serious attempt to portray a modern English man of business is to be found in Mr. Sydney Grundy's *Mammon*. Ordinarily the man of business is simply a peg to hang jokes upon. He invariably drops his H's and puts in superfluous aspirates. He is everlastingly making blunders upon his introduction into what passes upon the stage for *polite* society. And these blunders are so dwelt upon and exaggerated that any pit or gallery-spectator can instantly detect them and pride himself upon his superior breeding to the person who makes them, who is yet assumed to be moving in a better position, and to have better opportunities for learning good manners, than the pit or gallery spectator. And when the good-hearted tradesman makes these blunders, the aristocratic people on the stage at once call attention to them, and correct them with an utter absence not merely of the forms but of the spirit of good breeding. And this type of business-man has made the fortune of many modern comedies. Now it is not to be denied that many retired tradesmen do drop their H's and commit social blunders; and these apparently are the especial traits of character that are most acceptable to an English audience and most easily make it laugh. But the want of all sincerity and searchingness in the portrait must be apparent to any intelligent person who will take the trouble to read a modern comedy where an English tradesman is depicted, and then compare it with

the average English tradesman who can be met with behind any counter in town or country. And a playwright sitting down to write the part of an English man of business does not first consider how he can faithfully portray such and such an individual, and through him the heart and meaning of English commercial life, but how he can most readily make an average audience laugh at outrageous verbal distortions or pronounced social blunders. The same want of truthfulness will be found upon comparing that curiously unreal nondescript, the rustic of the London stage, with any living English peasant.

Now, while the stage remains so swaddled in pettiness and superficiality, the playwright who wishes to be successful will indulge the public and continue to manufacture for them their pet conventional stage-types. Out of the thousand spectators that nightly watch a play it may be safely assumed that nine hundred will be struck by some outward, obvious, unmeaning peculiarity of speech or manner rather than by any inward significant truth or suggestion of character. And the whole scheme and aim of dramatic art in this country being to attract the multitude, and no existence being possible to it except upon this footing, every play is framed upon the principle of immediately flattering and satisfying, not the one student of character and lover of literature, but the ninety-and-nine pleasure-seekers and sight-seers. And these pleasure-seekers have also a few tough British prejudices which the judicious playwright must beware of offending. The two chief subjects which are by common consent supposed to be most difficult of stage-treatment are religion and politics, because these are the subjects upon which counter opinions are most rife and popular feelings most easily raised.

As regards politics, they scarcely touch the moral or emotional nature of man at all. Surely the present disposition of political parties in this country, and the

present aims of statesmanship on either side, do not invite any attention from a serious dramatist. They would make a very worthless theme for any dramatic work except a farce. And the modern playwright need not give himself a moment's uneasiness because he finds himself debarred from treating English political life except in the spirit of farce, or in that bland and sugary way which, complimenting both sides upon being alike right, equally conveys that there is no question of human interest in the struggle between them. But suppose it were found that upon any matter of deep concern the two parties were divided; suppose it were found that political bias on the one side corrupted, and on the other side sustained human nature, then who could deny the dramatist the right of enforcing so much upon the stage? With religion the case is far different from politics, though the same motives of expediency have banished from the modern stage all treatment of it that is not purely conventional and superficial.¹

The present attitude of religious persons towards the stage is a somewhat curious one. For some two hundred years religious opinion in England has been more or less antagonistic to the theatre. But gradually the far-seeing and more liberal-minded teachers in the different sects have become alive to the fact that the theatre is immensely popular, and must be tolerated and reckoned with. It threatens to become a powerful influence in the life of the nation. And religious persons are also fast discovering that, in the huge sempiternal dullness and mechanical routine of English life, theatre-

¹ I would like to enlarge this paragraph, and so far change its drift as to claim for the stage the same right to deal searchingly and truthfully with politics as with religion. To-day our modern drama should lay hands upon every province of human life and thought, and be satisfied with nothing less than sovereign sway and masterdom over the whole realm. 25th April 1891.

going is not an unpleasant way of spending the evening. Like Dame Purecraft in the matter of eating pig, they would like to have it made as lawful as possible. So they come timorously, with the old notion still clinging to them that they are in "the tents of the wicked." How welcome to weak consciences have been the various entertainments that, under some convenient name or cloak, have afforded to religious persons a satisfaction of the ineradicable dramatic instinct, and saved them the sin of going to a theatre! How ludicrous is the spectacle of religion, shivering on the brink of Shakespeare at the Lyceum, and turning away to regale itself at the Christy Minstrels or the Chamber of Horrors! What a blank and stupefying denial of all the genial humane qualities of our nature is implied in the recent wholesale condemnation of the theatre by the great Boanerges of the Baptists! But the truth is that religious persons, after having vilified the theatre for two centuries, are fast coming back to it. Not all Mr. Spurgeon's shouting to his flock to stay and batten in his sheep-pens on the dismal moor of hyper-Calvinism will long keep them from straggling down to the green pastures and broad waters of the nation's intellectual life.

There is, then, in every audience at all our leading theatres, except perhaps those that are devoted to broad farcical comedy and burlesque, a certain proportion of religious persons who come timidly to the theatre with a vague sense of wrong-doing, and are shocked if there is any mention of religious subjects. Their views of life are such, that there is no general reconciliation possible between the two ideas of religion and the theatre, and so they wish to keep them utterly apart, in the same way that many worthy people find it convenient to keep their science in a separate mental compartment from their religion, from an uncomfortable feeling that if they once get face to face one of them will destroy the other.

In every audience there is a much larger proportion of simply indifferent persons, who would be the first to disclaim any particular reverence for any doctrine or precept of religion whatsoever, yet who pay the ordinary Englishman's ear and lip reverence to the current creed. And these also feel uneasy if religion is broached on the stage, because, having conveniently dispensed with it to a great extent in regulating their everyday lives, they think it may be very well allowed to remain in its present condition of honoured and respectable superannuation, as an affair of Sundays, and Parsons, and churches, and chapels.

Strange Englishmen! so cunning in the art of self-deception! Has, then, this religion of yours grown so valetudinarian that it can no longer take the robust exercise of out-of-door life? that you must shelter it from the keen east winds of science, and the daily uphill trudge of business, and the glow and bustle of healthy amusement? that you must deny it all the vigour and movement of everyday life, and only take it out for a little very gentle exercise once or twice on Sundays? Well, wrap it up then, keep it warm! It's in a "parlous state" truly; and, if the worst should happen, Heaven send us a good, serviceable, sound-winded, work-a-day religion to take its place.

Speaking generally, we may say that from old-accustomed prejudice, whose grounds they have never taken the trouble to examine, ordinary playgoers have a haunting feeling of the impropriety of the theatre as a place for even hinting that there is in the English nation to-day any such thing as religion at all. The idea of human life as being about six-sevenths secular and one-seventh sacred keeps possession of them, and they do not wish to have this convenient fiction disturbed or examined. Then, too, the dramatic faculty is so little developed in a general audience, there is so little

knowledge and appreciation of character, that they cannot discriminate between an author speaking *in propria persona* and his allowing his personages to speak whatever is natural and becoming to them. How little essential reverence of heart is at the bottom of the average play-goer's dislike of the mention of religion upon the stage may be gathered from the fact that plays that are implicitly choke-full of the deathfullest sort of Atheism, the denial of the divinity of man, are allowed to pass without protest, and run their hundreds of nights.

As a matter of expediency, then, it may be freely conceded that the playwright is wise in his day and generation not to meddle with religious matters, but to accept the arbitrary and conventional division of human nature into secular and sacred, and to ply his trade wholly in the secular domain, in apparent ignorance of whether there is anything sacred or no in man's nature, and whether Englishmen have a religion to-day, and whether it has any influence upon their character. Neither must the sadly comic spectacle of our two hundred sects—all of them right and all of them wrong—tempt him to a smile or a sigh, though one would fancy that the wasteful joke of starting two hundred agencies to the same end, the existence of each one implying the uselessness of the other one hundred and ninety-nine, must at last become apparent to the originators of it. It is quite certain, however, that the existence of such a restriction upon the dramatist forbids the hope of the English drama ever reaching forward to be a great art, and condemns it to remain as it is, the plaything of the populace, a thing of convention and pettiness and compromise. It is useless to upbraid modern playwrights for not producing great plays when in so small a matter as the putting upon the stage of so common a type of modern English life as a middle class tradesman, one is not allowed to paint him thoroughly, according to one's poor

judgment, in a faithful searching way, and giving, so far as the exigencies of dramatic art allow, a truthful picture of the man and his environment, and of the man moulded or modified by his environment. If a dramatist must not faithfully paint his brother British shopkeeper whom he has seen, how shall he be trusted to faithfully paint heroes and saints and demigods and other "tremendous personages" whom he has not seen? The drama claims for its province the whole heart and nature and soul and passions of man; and so far as religion has to do with these, so far is the dramatist within his right in noting the scope and influence of religion upon the character he has to portray. The whole teaching of modern psychology, the conception of human character as a natural production arising from the action of the various surrounding agencies upon the individual man and his ancestors through countless ages and the reactions resulting therefrom: this doctrine forbids the dramatist to accept any reservation of a certain plot or parcel of a man's nature which must be screened off and veiled and assumed to be non-existent before the analysis of the character can be made. Every character is woven all of a piece; if some threads are taken out, the garment is mutilated and falls to bits. The whole of the nature of man is sacred to the dramatist, as the whole of the body of man is sacred to the physician. One part is not more sacred than another. The folly, the hate, and meanness, and envy, and greed, and lust of human kind are just as sacred in this sense as the higher and nobler qualities, and are treasured with the same care. One might as well dictate to a surgeon that in his survey of the human body he must omit to take note of the presence of such and such an organ and its influence upon the rest of the body—say the heart—because of some sacred mystery attaching to it, as to dictate to a dramatist that he shall not be allowed in his study of a certain character to mark,

if necessary, the shaping and leavening of the whole of that character by the religious *milieu* in which it has been produced. It is for those who would deny to the dramatist the right to depict religious life upon the stage, to show either that religion has become a quite unessential and useless portion of human life, and is effete and defunct, and has no bearing upon character in England to-day, in which case the playwright can afford to treat it as a naturalist does an organ that has lapsed into a rudimentary state, or it is for them to show why religion should not occupy the same part in the dramatist's scheme and view of human life as it is supposed to do in the outer world around him—shall we say a seventh?

So far as the matter is part of the general compromise and toleration upon religious matters without which social life would be rendered grievously uncomfortable, it would doubtless be unwise to try to disturb the present equanimity and to arouse bitter passions that are now disarmed or slumbering. And also one would not willingly shock the sincere feeling of any worshipper, were it even of the most degraded and brutal fetish. There is a small enough stock of reverence in England to-day; one may well be content to endure a little of it wrongly directed and towards unworthy things.

But the matter is also part of the question of whether our drama shall ever rise to the dignity of its mission and exercise its right to portray and interpret and faithfully reflect the main and vital features of our national life; and upon this point the humblest writer for the stage has a right to be jealous and alert, and to see that his art is not rendered weak and lifeless, and its sustenance given to feed the beggarly array of decrepit prejudices that totter about this breathing world and suck into their numb and withered anatomies the nourishment that should go to build up a healthy body of public opinion.

Inasmuch as religion is a matter of controversy and

doctrine, the dramatist may be content to leave it in the clouds where the arguments and sophistries of divines have floated it. In this respect the relation of art towards religion is fixed in Tennyson's memorable lines—

I take possession of man's mind and deed,
I care not what the sects may brawl;
I sit as God holding no form of creed,
But contemplating all,

In no case could it be profitable for the stage to become the backer or antagonist of any doctrine or creed. But inasmuch as religion is also a matter of conduct and practice and character, the drama has every right to take it for part of its subject-matter.

And before quite resigning ourselves to the dominion of the popular prejudice, which holds that the dramatist should blink the question of man's spiritual nature and beliefs, it may be as well to glance at the accepted relations of religion and the drama during the times of the greatest dramatic activity and creation. The Greek tragedians made unsparing use of their country's religion, and wove it into their plays. In masterful and unquestioned sway over the destiny of man they reigned coequal with the gods, and usurped omnipotence in their dealings with the creatures of their hands. Again, all through our own Elizabethan writers there is the freest handling of religious matters whenever these come within the sweep of their pen. One has only to imagine the whole batch of dramatists of that era set to write a play that should be successful upon our modern English stage if produced for the first time to-day, to see how much the temper and state of preparation of the audience, and the knowledge of the dramatist that what he writes will be accepted seriously and in good faith, have to do with the production of great plays. We will take the three greatest and most representative names of that age,

Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Ben Jonson, and ask how they dealt with religious matters. The comparison is very interesting, as it also incidentally discovers the different bent of each genius and the different texture of his mind. The essential reverence of these three writers will scarcely be questioned, if reverence is to be reckoned by the wholesomeness of the feelings rather than by the squeamishness of the ears. Though even in the matter of words it may be asked whether the clean and healthy outspokenness of some of the Elizabethan writers is not more reverent of everything worth reverence than the putrid leer and imbecile suggestiveness of some music-hall songs that have been imported into the modern theatre.

To begin with Christopher Marlowe, "Son first-born of the morning, sovereign star!" In Marlowe there is none of the familiar playful quotation of Scripture so frequent in Shakespeare, or the broadly comic portraiture of religious hypocrisy unctuously mouthing Holy Writ to its own ends that Ben Jonson delights in. Marlowe's fiery genius sets directly about its main ends, and in *Doctor Faustus* seizes the heart and core of the Christian doctrine, and appropriates as much as is necessary for the scheme of his play. There is no hesitation, no question in Marlowe's mind as to the perfect right of his art to enter this region and take full possession of it. Fragments of Christian dogma are tossed hither and thither in the burning whirlpool with waifs and strays of heathen history and mythology, while the living heat of the poet's imagination binds and mats all the strange ingredients into one liquid flame of terror, and the spectator watches, with harrowing suspense and breathless inescapable impression of reality, the damnation of a soul. Omitting the wretched buffoonery of the comic scenes as possible interpolations or concessions to the groundlings, there is no room left for any thought

of reverence or irreverence. The question of the comparative truth of the Greek mythology and the creed of Christendom sinks into a matter of "words, words, words," as we contemplate the awful picture of the death-agony of Faustus. Marlowe compels our acquiescence that *that* at least is real, is true. It would be impertinent to defend the *Faustus* against any possible charge of irreverence which the rancid, bilious temperament of superfinical godliness might bring against it. No poet ever reaches such inaccessible heights of inspiration without remaining quite impervious and out of the reach of harm by any assault from that quarter. It could only be in an outburst of bewildered indignation or riotous satire that one could put the question, whether in the matter of reverence of man's spiritual nature the age that produced Marlowe's *Faustus* has any need to feel ashamed of itself when brought to the bar of the age that demanded a version of the same legend brought down to the average intelligence of a modern burlesque audience.

Upon turning from Marlowe to Shakespeare, we find a difference in the treatment of sacred subjects and the poet's attitude towards religion such as corresponds with the difference in the genius and temper of the two men. In neither of his four great tragedies is Shakespeare employed upon so vast and tremendous a theme as Marlowe had to work upon in *Faustus*. Neither *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Lear*, nor *Othello* have the same inherent supernatural grandeur, though all of them are far more human and domestic. It is useless, though it is most interesting to speculate, supposing that the ground had not been already occupied by Marlowe, what Shakespeare might have given us if he had treated the legend of Faustus in the meridian of his powers, in the *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* period.

In no respect is the varied universal play of Shake-

speare's genius, and his royal dominion over all things human and divine, more fully shown than in the use he makes of the Bible. He treats the Scriptures as if they belonged to him. Bishop Wordsworth, in his *Shakespeare and the Bible*, finds in the poet more than 550 Biblical quotations, allusions, references, and sentiments. *Hamlet* alone contains about eighty, *Richard the Third* nearly fifty, *Henry the Fifth* and *Richard the Second* about forty each. Shakespeare quotes from fifty-four of the Biblical books, and not one of his thirty-seven plays is without a Scriptural reference. Genesis furnishes the poet with thirty-one quotations or allusions, the Psalms with fifty-nine, Proverbs with thirty-five, Isaiah with twenty-one, Matthew with sixty, Luke with thirty-three, and Romans with twenty-three. Shakespeare does not take religious dogma for the foundation of any play, as Marlowe did in *Faustus*, nor does he search into the private life of religious persons as Ben Jonson and Molière did. All the bishops, friars, and legates who figure in his plays do so in their official capacity. How significant is the wide difference of Shakespeare's portraiture of hypocrisy in the "prezbie Angelo" from Ben Jonson's and Molière's portraiture of the same vice in the Banbury Puritan and in the *Tartuffe*!

What most strikes us in considering Shakespeare's attitude towards religion is the thorough saturation of his plays in the spirit and sentiment and phraseology of the moral rather than the doctrinal portion of Scripture. Though doctrinal allusions are far from scanty in his works, yet they are so little pronounced, so vaguely or discreetly worded, or belong so clearly to the official position of the speaker rather than to the conviction of the author, or are so common to all the sects, or if pertaining to one of them are cancelled by allusions to other doctrines sanctioned by other sects: in a word, so little sectarian bias peeps out in Shakespeare, that Catholics

and Anglicans and Independents have alike claimed him as belonging to their communion.

Shakespeare may or may not have been a believer in baptismal grace. It is, however, refreshing in the present dearth upon our stage of original English comedy to find so lively a compensation for its absence at our theatres, and so illustrious a proof of its present and perennial vitality in English life, as is afforded by the spectacle of a bishop laying the flattering unction to his soul that Shakespeare was a devout believer in this same doctrine of baptismal grace, because of two rather meagre and casual allusions to it which Shakespeare has placed in the mouths of two such widely diverse and problematic subjects for the operation of the sacrament as Henry the Fifth and Iago. Our sense of obligation to the good bishop is further deepened by his skillful complication of the situation in the introduction upon the scene of Mr. Bowdler. Mr. Bowdler, it appears, in his *Family Shakespeare*, has, with an excess of cautious reverence which the bishop feels must cause the judicious reader surprise and regret—Mr. Bowdler has seen reason to put half-asunder such an evidently unsuitable pair of yokefellows as Iago and baptismal grace, which Shakespeare had joined together. Mr. Bowdler has omitted the latter of Iago's lines—

To win the Moor—were 't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin.

Could ingenuity of mortal man have devised a more exquisitely humorous situation than is here, without any connivance of our own, forced upon us? What aspect of the imbroglio to glance at first or last, what logical way out of the manifold perplexity, whom to sympathise with first or most, Bishop Wordsworth or Mr. Bowdler, or Shakespeare handcuffed between them, one knows not, so thickly the higgledy-piggledy crowd of incon-

gruities come tumbling upon us! Poor timid Bowdler, very anxious to preserve Shakespeare for our families if he could do it without offence to decency and religion, still more anxious to preserve our families pious and respectable from contamination by Shakespeare's irreverence and loose talk, tries at least to stop Iago's mouth from blabbing of matters that Iago has no business to know anything about. The good bishop must have our Shakespeare for a devout Anglican, and lo! here is baptismal grace in our Shakespeare's soul, apparently tottering upon the rickety foundation of two incidental quotations in the lips of two such dubious connoisseurs of spiritual matters as Harry of England and the Spartan dog, while our poet's confirmed, desperate, ineradicable, irreclaimable, irrefragable paganism stands sure and "foursquare to all the winds that blow," based upon no less than one hundred and twenty-nine adjurations and appeals to heathen Jove and Jupiter, to say nothing of the rest of the Pantheon. The good bishop will, however, at all costs have our Shakespeare for a sound Churchman; in fact, in the present predicament, he will hazard the matter and baptize him will-he nill-he, were it but for the sake of so illustrious an example to his countrymen in a schismatic nineteenth century. And now up comes the wretched Bowdler with his whitewashing apparatus, and, applying the proverbial zealous ignorance of indiscriminate "Church restoration" to Shakespeare, is actually shaking down one of the slender props of grace in the poet's soul; has actually taken away from us the welcome evidence of the irreproachable Iago—we must hasten and bolster up the frail tenement with our own episcopal shoulders and administer a gentle episcopal chastisement to Bowdler, the well-meaning, mischief-doing little man!

Shade of that immortal genius, with what a smile of kindly pity dost thou elude all our attempts to cabin, crib, and confine in the fetters and tatters of our particular

sect thy spirit, whose creed was broad and general as the casing air, as wide and universal as the beneficent heaven whose arch rests impenetrably bright or impenetrably dark over every soul of man! How small a concern Shakespeare had for creeds and doctrines may best be gathered from the absence of any marked influence upon his plays of the religious struggle which England had passed through in the previous generation. And yet he is steeped in the language and spirit of the Bible. And it is just this attitude of his towards the English Scriptures that fits him to be the representative poet of England. With more care for dogma he might have sunk into the mere poetical figurehead of a sect or a creed; with less care for morality his work would have lacked the deep and permanent foundation, that all great art instinctively chooses, of resting upon wide-reaching principles of justice and truth that all human hearts as instinctively recognise and accept. The hateful, foolish, convenient maxim so often dinned into our ears of late, that the English modern drama should teach nothing and believe in nothing, receives no countenance from the greatest dramatists of the past, least of all from Shakespeare. The greatest art is as instinctively, as relentlessly, though as unobtrusively moral as Nature herself. One cannot always perceive it, but there is no escaping it. Dante inflicting the tortures of damnation upon myriads of innocent babes is as relentless as Nature in England to-day condemning myriads of English babes to the deep damnation of the life-long inheritance and propagation of their fathers' and forefathers' vices and diseases and crimes. Nature can do that; so can Dante: and Calvinists may take heart of grace from contemplating the fact.

It will not be necessary to dwell upon the didactic side and purpose of Shakespeare's constant employment of Scriptural phrases, precepts, and aspirations. Many

of his best known and most frequently quoted passages are parallelisms or paraphrases of Scripture morality, or of some part of that large body of moral axioms and worldly wisdom and justice which belongs alike to the Bible and to other systems of religion and philosophy. Instances are so numerous and well known that they will occur to every one. It is generally and carelessly assumed that these didactic passages convey the nature and extent of Shakespeare's relations and obligations to the Bible. But this is far from being the fact. His didactic use of Scripture-history and morality, though it is the noblest and most valuable, is by no means the only result, nor is it the personal and distinguishing mark, of Shakespeare's close acquaintance with the Bible. Many other poets have freely employed Scripture for serious and didactic ends from Milton down to Montgomery. What distinguishes Shakespeare is the perfectly free and playful and everyday use he makes of Scripture by putting it into the mouths of all sorts and conditions of people on all sorts of occasions. Surely those keen huntsmen of "lewd and pernicious enormity" in innocent places, those playgoers who strain at the gnat of a solitary Scriptural allusion in a modern play, can have no notion what herds of camels they swallow every time they witness a play of Shakespeare's in its integrity.

How utterly subservient Shakespeare deems the treatment of religion upon the stage to the preservation of dramatic truth and reality may be seen in *Richard the Third*, where religion and morality become the flimsiest child's baubles in the merciless intellectual grasp of the tyrant.

Iago, besides being an authority on the efficacy of baptismal grace, is "full of most blessed condition" in his reference to Holy Writ, and his constant display of wise and moral maxims. Poor Bowdler cannot understand it, and smells irreverence.

Richard the Second so far allows his sense of human injury to get the better of his sense of religious propriety that he institutes a comparison in the matter of treachery between himself and Christ, and earlier in the play he cries out upon Bagot, Bushy, and Green as "three Judases, each one thrice worse than Judas!" Poor Bowdler can do nothing but hold up his hands in horror and excise the passage, and Bishop Wordsworth smilingly pats his approval. No possible testimony to the efficacy of baptismal grace to be squeezed out of such a line! Away with it!

Shylock has several allusions to Old Testament personages and facts, whose use is not very apparent to the dim, bewildered, tender-conscienced, narrow-visioned Bowdler. While what can family respectability and piety make of such a speech as "Yes, to smell pork; to eat of the habitation which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the devil into"? a speech in which the heights of dramatic propriety and religious impropriety are simultaneously reached at one bound. Bowdlerism can only sorrowfully shake its poor bewildered head at the dramatist's readiness to sacrifice every rag of deference to its pet prejudices, and, at all costs, to give the full and exact truth of Shylock's manner of speech.

There are a large number of Scriptural allusions in Shakespeare which apparently have neither any moral to enforce, nor any special dramatic fitness to the speaker or the occasion. Of such is Antony's—

Oh, that I were
Upon the hill of Basan to outroar
The horned herd!

which shows Shakespeare's rather than Antony's diligent study of the Old Testament, and which indiscriminate and unnecessary employment of Scripture language again shocks and grieves our poor sensitive Bowdler, and fills

the soul of that great mountain of British Bowdlerism, Samuel Johnson, with "pity and indignation." Leaving Bowdlerism to digest or reject as it may this frequent indiscriminate and casual employment of Scripture by somewhat unqualified persons, we pass on to notice what is more shocking and irreverent still, the extensive acquaintance with sacred terms and topics shown by Shakespeare's clowns and comic personages.

Hamlet and *Richard the Third* may justly have some concern with the affairs of conscience, but what moral necessity, except perhaps the sufficiently obvious and imperative one of shocking all the tribe of Bowdlers, can there be to give Lancelot Gobbo a long soliloquy about conscience and the devil? What is there to be said for Cassio's broaching the awful tenets of Calvinism in a state of drivelling drunkenness? How are we to view the utter disregard of all poor Bowdler's sense of moral fitness, the reckless, callous, ingrained want of all consideration and fellow-feeling for jaundiced, green-sick, sour-milk, retchy, phthisicky, maudlin, sniffing, nibbling, dyspeptic, venomous, blear-eyed, addle-headed, spasm-bitten, puffy, flatulent, east-wind-swollen, nineteenth-century religiosity, which Shakespeare discovers in his unscrupulous relish for putting, on comic occasions, Scriptural allusions and terms and scraps into the mouths of such personages as Sir Toby Belch, Feste, Moth, Armado, Jaques, Celia, Touchstone, Mrs. Quickly, Justice Shallow, Prince Henry, Pinch the schoolmaster, Dromio of Syracuse, Mrs. Page, the gravedigger, the clown in *All's Well*, and the porter in *Macbeth*? "Most unkindest kind cut of all," and double superlative topsy-turvy perversion of all reverence, morality, and religion as Bowdler understands them, the arch-quoter and arch-purloiner of odds and ends from Holy Writ in all Shakespeare is none other than, whom could one guess?—Sir John Falstaff. Sir John—Heaven forbid one should

fail of all due honour and respect to him when he comes so pat to support one's theory!—Sir John never loses an opportunity of patching up his old body for heaven by seasoning his conversation with godly saws and ancient instances. He is a perfect mine of Scriptural illustration, and seems to have had every qualification for editing a Reference Bible. "I am as poor as Job, my lord, but not as patient." "In the state of innocency Adam fell, and what should poor Jack Falstaff do in the days of villainy?" "Oh, if men were to be saved by merit, what hole in hell were hot enough for him?" "A whoreson Achitophel." "I never see thy face but I think on hell-fire and Dives that lived in purple, for there he is in his robes, burning, burning, burning." "Slaves as ragged as Lazarus in the painted cloth where the glutton's dogs licked his sores." "In the shape of man, Master Brooke, I fear not Goliath with a weaver's beam, because I know also life is a shuttle,"—two quotations and a dubious pun in one sentence. "If to be fat is to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine are to be loved." "If then the tree may be known by the fruit." "And for thy walls a pretty slight drollery, or the story of the prodigal." "His face is Lucifer's kitchen, where he doth nothing but roast malt-worms." "I think the devil will not have me damned lest the oil that is in me should set hell on fire."

No abuse, good Mr. Bowdler, no abuse in the world! he does but dispraise reverence before the wicked, that the wicked may not fall in love with it. "God be thanked for these Scriptural quotations; they offend none but the virtuous."

Bowdlerism stands aghast, shuddering, woefully "tickled in its catastrophe"; cannot for its life understand how this reckless want of reverence for all its consecrated baggage and pedlar's pack of shibboleths and symbols and phrases, is yet twinned with the deepest heart

reverence for virtue, and truth, and justice, and faith, and honesty, and beauty, and righteousness.

But, O Bowdlerism, consider it, what if Shakespeare's main idea about religion was even briefly this, the very same as another Teacher's idea about the Sabbath which also poor British Bowdlerism can never bring itself to accept—namely, that religion was made for man, and not man for religion.

On leaving Shakespeare and turning to Ben Jonson we are again met with a characteristic change in the poet's attitude towards Scriptural things. "Broad-based, broad-fronted, bounteous, multiform" Ben is more akin to Molière than to Shakespeare in his treatment of religious affairs and persons. Though Ben has no religious figure of such importance and tragic significance as Tartuffe, he has drawn the hypocrites of his time with a fierce and unsparing hand. There is a riotous glee and overflowing merriment of satire in his delineations of Puritan hypocrisy in *Bartholomew Fair* and the *Alchemist*. The full-length portrait of Zeal-of-the-land Busy is without parallel and beyond all chance of competition in its immitigable force of broad truthful humour and merciless exposure of that constant type in English life, the religious professor who has but one object in life, the promotion of the self-same and identical interests of the glory of God and his own stomach. The scene in the fair, in which, after having gorged himself with Bartholomew-pig as a protest against Judaism, he upsets Joan Trash's basket of gingerbread images as a protest against Popery, is one of the finest and richest pieces of comedy in our literature. A noticeable feature of Ben Jonson's religious professors is their inveterate habit of quoting Bible phrases. His deacons quote Scripture by the yard. Tribulation Wholesome, Ananias, the Banbury man, and Dame Purecraft are incurably afflicted with this loquacity of Scriptural quotation. One meets

with as many as sixteen Scriptural allusions and phrases in about as many speeches. Ben Jonson seems to have been troubled with no qualms about the propriety of making his religious persons speak their natural everyday language. To what a small extent this perfectly free treatment of Scriptural matters in Marlowe, Shakespeare, and Jonson is part of the general coarseness and freedom of speech in that time, is seen by the impossibility of tearing out and wrenching away these several portions of their works without great damage and injury to the remainder, and leaving the writer's mind and spirit misrepresented and mutilated; while almost every coarse and indecent expression in these writers may be readily stripped and detached from the setting in which it is found.

The mere mention of *Tartuffe*, and its acknowledged position as one of the glories and masterpieces of universal dramatic literature is a sufficient reply, one would think, to all who urge that it is not lawful to treat religion upon the stage. The play and Molière's preface to it remain as a triumphant assertion for all time of the sovereignty of the drama in its own domain. And that domain is the whole of the nature, and heart, and passions, and conduct of men.

There is an old proverb which will of course be flung at any modern playwright who mentions such names as Shakespeare, Marlowe, Molière, and Ben Jonson. He will be reminded that fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But by your leave, good folks, the boot is fast stuck on the other leg this time. There is no maxim that forbids even fools to tread where angels have rushed in, and it is for you to prove how and why a modern playwright does wrong in treading after those whose shoe-latchets he is unworthy to loose. The quotation upon the stage by any character of any portion of the noblest example of our noble literature could never have

sounded strange in modern ears until the debts of our language to those writings had been forgotten and annulled by those who would rather see our stately and beautiful mother-tongue turned into the roaring, gossiping, evil-speaking trollops of every vile resort, than employed as the mouthpiece and bearer of any intelligible message to mankind.

The success or failure of any individual play is of the merest momentary consequence, and need not here be brought into our thoughts. But the matter of a free atmosphere for dramatists to work in, the matter of some sort of an appeal or tribunal beyond the heated, changeful prejudices and caprices of the populace, is of the greatest importance to the future of the drama.

The question of the right of dramatists to faithfully depict modern religious life is only part of the much wider and more general question of their right and duty and ability to deal faithfully with whatsoever aspect they try to depict of the huge unwieldy mass of modern human life. That larger right and duty indubitably contains the smaller; nay, cannot in any way be detached from it. And in face of our utterly insignificant labours and attainments in that larger field a modern playwright had best keep silence.

O human life! so varied, so vast, so complex, so rich and subtle in tremulous deep organ tones, and soft proclaim of silver flutes, so utterly beyond our spell and insight, who of us can govern the thunder and whirlwind of thy ventages to any utterance of harmony, or pluck out the heart of thy eternal mystery?

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